

NEW WORLDS SF 2/6

Beginning

THE SHORES OF DEATH

By Michael Moorcock

NEW WORLDS SF 144



**While humanity awaited destruction
he followed a dark obsession**

BI-MONTHLY

NEW WORLDS

EDITED BY
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MOORCOCK

SF

Contents

The Shores of Death (1)	<i>Michael Moorcock</i>	5
Private Shape	<i>Sydney J. Bounds</i>	50
Integrity	<i>P. F. Woods</i>	55
I Remember, Anita . . .	<i>Langdon Jones</i>	69
Andromeda	<i>Clifford C. Reed</i>	81
New Experience	<i>E. C. Tubb</i>	107
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What's the Argument?	<i>Editorial</i>	2
Books		119
Letters to the Editor		123

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WHAT'S THE ARGUMENT ?



SPARKED OFF ORIGINALLY by the recent Guest Editorials, fanned by Ballard's article on William Burroughs (NW 142), a dispute has been in progress between our readers. Largely it has been between those who are nervous that SF will become too far-out and obscure for their taste and those who want it to go as far-out as it can without coming back on itself. The former say that they read SF for entertainment, not 'art,' the latter say that SF may be the only hope for literature and want it to be as artistic as hell.

Controversy is healthy in any field and gives it progression, but we feel that those who want 'art' and those who want 'entertainment' in SF may simply be quarrelling over terms. All good entertainment is art of its kind, all good art is entertaining.

Today, with its large and usually enthusiastic audience, SF should be able to cater for all tastes and a magazine should cater for all tastes if it is to survive. The main demand we make of an author is that his story should be entertaining to the reader—on one level or on many.

We get a lot of 'straightforward' stories from authors which are merely re-workings of themes so tired, so over-used that they can't possibly entertain. We also get 'experimental' stories which, apart from seeming to be obscure for obscurity's sake, are also badly written. We don't want either.

However, the difference between a magazine and an anthology of the normal sort (Carnell's *New Writing* is an exception and so was *Star SF*) is that it is the func-

tion of the anthology to select the best of the old, whereas it's the function of the magazine to find—and encourage—the best of the new. The SF reader is happy to go to the anthologies to read stories which conform to earlier-established conventions, but he buys a magazine to find out what's going on *now*, and expects to find *new* treatments, *new* ideas, *new* writers establishing *new* conventions. If he does not find this, then he might just as well stick to the anthologies. Yet without the magazines—and editors like Campbell, Gold and Carnell, all of whom have picked SF out of its periodic ruts over the years—there would be no anthologies to speak of, and SF would cease to become a dynamic medium and would become as rigid and as decadent as the conventional detective mystery became in the thirties.

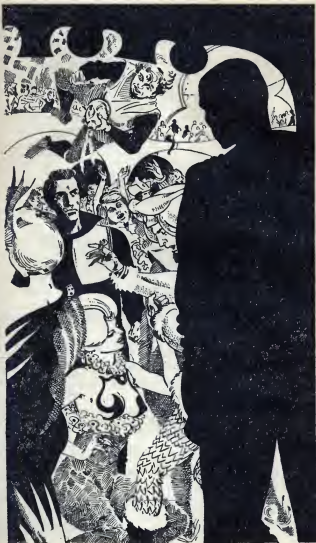
Yesterday's conventions have no place in today's magazine. It is the job of the magazine writer and editor to search for new ideas and methods of treatment if they are to fulfill a magazine's correct function and encourage the progress of a field which has, as its main convention, a built-in necessity to avoid conventions.

This is what we are trying to do, and our increasing circulation shows, better than anything else, that this is what you want us to do.

Really new treatments of old ideas, *fairly* conventional treatments of new ideas, and best of all new treatments of new ideas, all have a place here. Vitality, originality and variety is what we require of our authors—and it is authors supplying us with what we want who will be published here. Expect to be surprised, expect to be shocked, expect to be excited—but don't expect to know what to expect. Even we don't know that.

As you will note, we have started to publish illustrations again—in response to many readers' demands and because we feel that a magazine should contain good illustrations, offering what books cannot. Let us know what you think of the idea, and also what kind of illustrations you prefer.

The Editor



THE SHORES OF DEATH

Michael Moorcock

First of two parts

o n e

Earth Wake

THE PARTY WAS being held in his honour, celebrating his return from the cold misery of space. But he thought of it also as something of a farewell party for the human race, a premature Wake held by the soon-to-be-deceased.

It was a noisy party, a colourful party, a splendid, exciting party, and it swirled all around him in the huge hall. It was packed full of life; full of heads and hair and bellies and breasts, legs and chests and arms and hands; people with flowing blood in their veins, pumping hearts under their ribs, nerves at work, muscles moving. Their bizarre and grotesque costumes were of a dazzling multitude of colours. They drank down the liquor and ate up the food and they danced and flirted and they talked—they talked all the time. It is necessary, he thought.

Music came from all parts of the hall and counter-pointed the laughter, the voices in excited conversation, soft voices, passionate voices, sensuous voices, sharp voices, sardonic voices. The throng was in good humour. He felt the warmth and the pleasure, felt he might relax, might forget his ordeal...

While Earth tried to laugh away the knowledge of ultimate destruction, Clovis Marca sought the impossible, his dark ambition driving him on. Was it driving him to madness or something else?

But as he reached for the goblet, Clovis Marca saw his bloody pursuer again, the enigmatic face in shadow and the dark clothes merging with the blackness. He recognised the awkward way in which the head was held, as if the man had weak neck muscles and must exert himself to keep his head erect. Marca stared at him, but there was no response from the dark figure, no sign that he knew Marca was looking at him.

Marca poured himself a drink, wondering whether to ignore the man or cross the hall and confront him. All his life Marca has practiced self-control; to him it was virtually an end in itself. But now he felt afraid, felt his heart pound and his body tense. He took a sip from the goblet then put it down on the table, his lean face frowning. There were a great many people between him and the man, forming a heaving, almost solid barrier. Being very tall Marca could look over the heads and see the still figure of the man standing in shadow, detached from the party.

Then Marca began to move forward, almost involuntarily; pushing through the throng, feeling that *everything* but himself and the dark man was unreal, for the noise of the party seemed distant now, and the crush of the bodies hardly tangible.

He *would* confront him. He would ask him his name and his reason for following him. The man seemed to *know*—but that was impossible . . .

Overhead a youth levitated, ascending wildly towards the nearest gallery where laughing men and women reached out, trying to grab him. He was laughing so much himself that he could hardly control his flight, threatening to crash on to the heads of the crowd below him. He had a bottle in his hand and, as he veered about in the air like a gigantic drunken moth, the bottle spilled its contents, raining golden liquid down into the hall. Some of the stuff caught Marca in the eyes and he brushed it from them without stopping, yet when he looked at the place where the dark man had been, he was gone.

Marca searched the hall and saw him moving slowly

towards one of the big oblong entrances, the crowd, like the foaming wake of a ship, seeming to divide about him as he walked. Marca shrugged. The man turned, still holding his head in that strange way, and glanced back at Marca. The dark-clad figure was thin, the head long and pale, the sombre eyes hooded, colourless. He was certainly the same man. Marca shrugged again emphatically, and felt someone touch his hand. It was his best friend, Narvo Velusi, his host, a man of over 160, nearing death...

Death, thought Marca as he smiled automatically, death... the Angel of Death...

"Are you enjoying your party, Clovis?"

"Wonderful, Narvo—it was good of you. Nice to feel so many people about me again..."

"But you look a bit pale—perhaps I was thoughtless. I should have waited a couple of days. After all, you only got off the ship this afternoon."

"No, I meant it—it's a relief to be back on Earth and a pleasure to be with so many people." He looked for the dark man, but he had gone. "Did you invite the man in the dark clothes?" Marca described him. Velusi shook his head.

"But I told everyone to bring whom they liked," he explained. "It's open house—to welcome you back."

"He was on the landing field when I arrived," Marca realised he had spoken too quietly, Velusi hadn't heard him. He spoke louder: "I've seen him before—not just on Earth. Byzantium, Einstein, Nehru, Mars..."

"He sounds as if he's been following you around," Velusi smiled, taking Marca's arm. "Come on, I promised some friends that I'd get hold of you."

Deliberately, Marca relaxed as Velusi led him to the nearest gravishute. This was a circular shaft at the bottom of which was a force-beam generator. A single button by the opening could control the strength of the beam so that one could drift gently down or be pushed gently up. Inside the opening was a simple hand-grip which could be grasped to halt one's progress.

The harnessing of this power had contributed a great deal to Earth's present civilisation, and all techniques

were now based on it, as earlier they had been based on nuclear energy.

They went up to the highest gallery, hundreds of feet above the floor of the hall. There were only a few people here, lying on couches, talking quietly. Most of them were old acquaintances. Marca greeted them with pleasure. He sat down on a couch next to Velusi.

"How was your voyage?" a short woman asked.

"Awful," he smiled.

"Aren't they always? What about the *space-ache*? Are you suffering now?" She shook her head in sympathy, her feathery headress waving like a palm in a tornado. "A *year* away from *Earth*—all those planets—it must have been *unbearable*—weren't you very *frightened*?" Evidently she was wondering why he had made the trip at all, as most of them were. But they'd never know.

"Sometimes," he said. He tried to think of something more to say that wouldn't sound too melodramatic. Actually if there was a word to describe his experiences, then the word was *nightmarish*. He had had to force himself on from one star-system to the next, the pull of Earth growing stronger and stronger with every day away from his home planet, a pull a million times stronger than gravity, a pull that seemed to him mystical and psychological as well as physiological—an inexplicable pull that everyone on Earth felt the moment they took to space, a pull that kept the largest part of the population planet-bound from choice. "Sometimes..." he said again, and Velusi helped him by laughing and saying:

"Let's talk of other things. Have you been to see Carleon's new novel—the energy-mobiles are very impressive."

And the people smiled and talked, steering every conversation away from the mention of space, not merely for Marca's sake, but for their own. They did not want to talk of space, of ships and planets and galaxies—and the new stars in the sky, far-away, but always closer.

So it had been smiles, smiles, smiles all that summer. Smiles and laughter and handshakes all round. Oh,

thought Marca, what a civilised, saintly world this is. But passion moves, passion rolls under some civilised skins, passion shifts in a few breasts this summer, this summer of smiles with death in the sky and nobody worrying about the great flashing finish that will come not to them, probably, but to their offspring. Will it come to me? Is there any way to stop it? The Angel of Death... But it's a fine world, a graceful world, a beautiful world, make no mistake. It's a good world, a good life—a good life...

He smiled and joked and helped to keep the easy, superficial talk going, as careful as the rest to avoid the pitfalls, the slips of the tongue that could ruin the conversation. And the more they drank, the easier it became. Marca and Velusi drank sparingly, for their separate reasons.

Smiles surrounded him, and below the noise increased in volume as the party continued, the party they must all keep going somewhere for another two hundred years. Two hundred years, thought Marca, it isn't much...

Talk and smile, anecdote and epigram; epigram and anecdote until physical weariness made sleep possible and the prospect of dreaming less frightening. Then they would take their leave and go home and the party would be adjourned for another night. Soon it would be over forever. All of it.

t w o

A Walk in the Flower Forest

NEXT DAY, FASTINA Cahmin learned that Clovis Marca had been seen entering the Flower Forest, so she went there herself.

Fastina Cahmin was a widow, twenty-eight, black-haired and all-alive. Often happy, often calm, this afternoon she was unquiet and anxious. She hadn't known of last night's party for Marca and she regretted it. She wandered alone in the Flower Forest, a tall girl, every part of her vital as she walked. Only her face

was still, and it was a beautiful face, thoughtful and serious.

Around her rose the trunks of the huge flowers, shining greens and browns, and the scents were so heavy that they drugged her somewhat so that she felt unreal and stopped noticing that the warmth of the forest was a little uncomfortable after the coolness of the spaceship she'd arrived in.

Above her the leaves, the petals, the heat-hazy sky and the sun. Beneath her feet, petals of all colours. Large petals of pale purple, small ones of dark purple, pink, pale yellow and mauve. Petals of heavy yellow, scarlet, cerise and crimson, petals of soft blue and orange, sometimes ankle deep. And there was every grade of sunlit green, from near-black to near-white, where flower trees stood tall and cool or clustered to the ground.

The dress that she wore was also green, its light fabric flowing about her body. She carried nothing. She turned down a path that was thick with the cerise flowers fallen from the trees above her. It was cooler in this avenue. Her stride was long, though she was not walking quickly. Her stride was long because her legs were long.

She had followed Marca to the Flower Forest and hoped to meet him there. She had already followed him from Earth, to Mars, to Einstein (Betelgeuse), to Byzantium (Mira), to Nehru (Aldebaran) and now, slightly ahead of him on the passenger liner, back to Earth, to her relief, for the long absence from Earth had been hard to bear. People had soon discovered that any comparatively long absence from Earth resulted in mental and physical discomfort that could build up to indescribable agony unless a quick return to the home planet was made. Only those born beyond Earth were able to resist Earth's pull for longer periods. In fact, Fastina marvelled at her stamina as well as that of the man she had pursued.

Clovis Marca had his mysterious obsession to goad him on from system to system, and she had her love for him—a love which she'd been able to test, though she still couldn't analyse it, by her unflagging pursuit

of him. Whatever it was he sought—object, person or abstract idea—she hated it. It kept him moving, gave him no time to notice her and she wanted him to notice her, wanted him to love her, too.

Until the previous year he had been a busy man, virtual ruler of Earth and the auxiliary worlds. A man with absolute power and the absolute trust of the electorate. When he and his government had abdicated last year, believing that there was no longer a need for government, she had been hopeful, thinking he would now have more leisure. But less than a month later he had set off into space.

A much-respected man, Clovis Marca, famous for his philosophical writings, his easy stoicism, his unselfish energy, his kindness and his wisdom. There were many to match him in most of these qualities, but not in all of them. This may have been why she loved him so much, she thought, yet there was more to it than that, for Marca was the golden man, the archetypal father-brother-son-leader, the darling of the world. She knew that there were forces in the world which moved humanity to make inexplicable actions, to single out its heroes and love them inexplicably—the undertow, the zeitgeist that all the logic, the learning, or the technical skill of the 30th century could not divert for long, and she felt that this force was possibly strongest in her and that might have been why she loved him. He was not particularly handsome, had a tendency to look gaunt and stern in a world which admired insouciance and youthfulness. He was very tall, even when not wearing the fashionable high-heeled boots, yet his direct, rapid movements lacked the grace of his fellows. A disturbing man in a society which did not like to be disturbed.

Oh, Clovis, she thought, there is so much I can give you in return . . .

And so she continued her abstracted progress through the quiet forest in the hope that she might bump into him, for she had no idea why he had come here or which way he had gone.

She did not bump into Clovis Marca; she bumped

into Andros Almer instead and knew at once that the meeting wasn't accidental. He had tried to get in touch with her four times since she had arrived back on Earth. Her lover while her husband was alive, he had asked her to live with him after her husband died, but by that time Clovis Marca had resigned from the government and she had made up her mind to seek him out—not by letters or recordings or viewphone calls, but personally or not at all.

Andros had a dark, tanned face, slightly slanting eyes and cheekbones, full lips and a wry expression that seemed a little studied. He was dressed in a deep blue pleated shirt, grey leggings, with a grey cloak. She had liked him, just as she'd liked her husband, and had enjoyed her life with both of them. But now there were deeper emotions to be satisfied.

As Andros walked lightly through the cerise flowers towards her he smiled and she smiled back.

"Hello, Andros. Are you happy? Look at the sun, the sky—what a wonderful day!"

He laughed. "You've been avoiding me, Fastina. Yes, I'm happy enough. I'm sorry to intrude, but for all their passion, their logic and their urgency, my recordings, you know, were unanswered, my roboids dismissed with polite messages. I had to see you, to ask you to live with me, once again. I *have* to ask you personally. Will you?"

She smiled at him as he took her hand. "Wait until I've finished this pursuit of mine, Andros, and then if I'm unlucky, ask me again."

He shrugged and gave a mock frown. "My vanity is mortally wounded."

"I hope not, Andros," she said lightly, "for vanity makes for variety in a man, whereas humility offers only the humdrum—and I'd hate you to be that."

"Then Clovis should not attract you—for his lack of vanity is well-known. Can I at least take you to the meeting?"

"Is there a meeting?"

"Is there a meeting! You must be more distracted than I guessed. That's why Clovis is here. Everyone interested is in the Great Glade discussing the question

of the intergalactic flights for the final time. It will be decided today whether to continue them or abandon them when the last ship comes home."

"When is it due?"

"A day or so, I think."

"I thought it was agreed to abandon the flights."

"Some disagree—one or two—thus the debate. I thought that's where you were going."

"You can take me there now, Andros, if you like. I hope Clovis hasn't spoken yet."

Andros put a small instrument to his lips and blew soundlessly into it. He waited, looking up, as his carriage moved down through the flower trees, hardly disturbing a leaf, in response to the subsonic call. It hovered a foot above the ground, its ornate metal scroll-work glistening red and yellow. Andros helped her on to the plush couch and lay down next to her. He blew on the instrument and the carriage rose into the hot sky. Through its transparent floor, she saw the mass of brightly coloured flowers, some measuring twenty feet across, moving swiftly past.

She said nothing, for she was busy composing herself. Andros probably noticed, because he didn't look at her, but stared with apparent interest at the flowers until the carriage had found a space for itself among the hundreds of other carriages hovering above the Great Glade where that part of Earth's society sufficiently concerned with the problem of intergalactic flight had met to debate. For a second she thought she felt Andros probing her mind. But she dismissed the idea, guessing that it came from her own abnormal mental state.

"I can see you aren't wearing a gravstrap," Andros said, reaching under the couch. He handed her the thin, tubular belt and fitted a similar one under his arms. She copied him. They left the carriage and drifted down among the packed tiers until they found two vacant chairs and seated themselves.

Below them, on the central dais, a man was speaking. He was a squat man with a pointed, black beard. He wore a purple headress, like a turban, a red, knee-length coat, open at the neck and flared at the waist, and flat-

heeled, calf-length boots. Evidently one of the unfortunates who had to spend months or years away from Earth, supervising the agricultural or industrial worlds which supplied Earth and left space free for gardens like the Flower Forest.

"Barre Calax," Andros whispered, "Chief Controller of Ganymede Metals, born in space and a bit of deviationist. I think he even likes living on the Ganymede Complex," he smiled as she looked a little surprised. "He's the only man strongly opposed to the abandonment of the project."

She did not listen closely to Barre Calax until she had seen Marca, sitting with his arms folded, dressed in a dark red toga, listening intently to Calax from his seat in the first tier. Beside Clovis was Narvo Velusi, dressed as soberly as Clovis in a russett toga, his high-heeled black boots stretched out before him, his body bending forward slightly. Velusi had been Marca's right hand man in the disbanded government. He had a thin, aesthetic face, veined but unwrinkled, a lot of white hair and sharp, almost black eyes that were alive with intelligence.

In spite of the effort he was making to emulate the musical tones of the Earth people, Calax's voice seemed harsh to Fastina. He was speaking urgently and bluntly.

"I'm not ignoring the facts. I know all the arguments against making more flights. I know what they say happens to the crews and I agree that what happens is disgusting. But it doesn't matter." He paused to judge the effect of his words, he looked around at the polite, composed faces. He wiped his sweating forehead and breathed in heavily. His words seemed to have had no effect. He continued:

"In two hundred years—maybe fifty more at the most—the whole race will be dead. Surely it's better that we send something of ourselves out there—something that is going to be found, something *alive* that might breed on a new planet in a new galaxy, that might start the race again? Let's keep trying. We haven't tried everything, have we? New discoveries are made daily. I know all our conditioning and training is failing to

date, but we've got to go on trying." He paused again. "It's a valuable human trait to go on trying..." Calax wiped his forehead and waited for the response. None came. "That's all." He went to his seat, obviously aware that the only response he had awakened was one of slight uneasiness.

Narvo Velusi got up and looked at the mediator who sat slightly to one side of the dais. The mediator was a fair-haired young man who stroked his moustache continuously. He nodded and Velusi walked on to the dais.

"I think we all sympathise with Barre Calax's sentiments," he said slowly. "But most of us feel that the degeneration of mind and body that comes to intergalactic astronauts is so *gross* that it would be a crime even to continue asking for volunteers. Secondly, we feel that if there is an intelligent race in another galaxy we should not want it to see the—contents of one of our intergalactic ships." He sighed. "Thirdly, as Barre Calax knows, we rarely get one crew-member back alive. They commit suicide almost before they're out of the galaxy. I agree that we should leave something behind, though nothing physical can survive the cataclysm. I have an idea which I shall publish soon for your approval. Tomorrow the last ship we sent out arrives back here. We have already gained some idea of what we shall find inside—our laser-screens gave us a hint before transmission ceased. Three men and three women went out. If there is anything alive now it will not be what we should like to think of as human. Barre Calax is now the only dissenter. If there are others, let them speak. If there are not, then we shall have to regard the project as closed. Although I and my colleagues are no longer officially members of the Direction Committee, it will be our duty to tidy up the final details of the project we encouraged and, perhaps, organise work on the new project which I have in mind. Are there any other dissenters?"

There were none. Someone spoke, and the silvery phonoplates hanging in the air around the auditorium picked up the words and amplified them to the others.

"May we hear Clovis Marca on the subject?"

Velusi glanced at Marca. Marca said: "I can add nothing more to what Narvo Velusi has said. I am sorry—there is little consolation. The invading galaxy is already approaching the speed of light and when it exceeds that speed it will convert to energy—converting us with it. The end of both galaxies. There is nothing we can do but live our lives to the full in as civilised a manner as possible. Many of us will be—many of us will be dead before that time. We have agreed that no more children shall be born. Those still alive will be old and ready for death, I hope. Our only destiny now is to die. Let us do it well."

There was silence. Fastina felt overwhelmed by Marca's reminder. She felt miserable and she felt proud. The human race hadn't been going all that long, she thought, but it had grown up quickly. What a thing it could have been, given the chance. There had been a certain amount of mild panic the year before, when the government had first released the facts, the explanation of what the new stars in the sky signified. A whole galaxy swinging off course towards our own, its speed increasing at a fantastic rate. A tremendous conception that many still could not quite accept. Death. The death of everything. Yet, in reality, merely a transformation, a metamorphosis of matter from one state to another. The human race was merely a small piece of that matter on a slightly larger piece, ready to be transformed along with the rest. At length, perhaps, new galaxies would form, new suns and planets would arise—and perhaps a new race similar to humanity—but even Earth's most enthusiastic scientists could not completely convince themselves of the relative unimportance of their race, for after all it did seem to be the only intelligent one in the galaxy. But was intelligence important, she wondered. It wasn't the first time she'd asked herself that question, and it wasn't the first time she'd been unable to answer.

Nobody was leaving the auditorium yet, people were talking quietly amongst themselves. Marca, Velusi and Calax were deep in conversation.

Perhaps centuries ago, she thought, when there were

religions and the promise of some sort of super-physical after-life, we should have accepted this end as the work of a god. Yet people had resisted death then, so maybe in their hearts they hadn't really believed in their religions. Now there was only the code of decent behaviour, of personal control and civilised demeanour. It was a nice way of life, but it didn't offer any hope.

Nothing offered that any more.

She saw that Clovis Marca was standing up, probably preparing to leave. He was pointing into the air, towards a black carriage hovering above him. Barre Calax was nodding. Automatically, she restrained her impulse to go to the carriage. Then she thought, No, it could be now or never, and without saying anything to Andros, she squeezed her arm against the gravstrap and began to rise into the air, guiding herself gently towards the black carriage.

Andros shouted after her. Then he saw where she was going and shrugged. He moved aloft towards his own carriage, shouting something to her which she didn't catch.

She reached the black carriage before Marca and his friends. She drifted over the side and sat down on one of the deep blue couches, waiting for him.

As he, Velusi and Calax came into view, she noted his quickly-controlled look of surprise and then the amused smile. He hovered beside the carriage. "Do you want a lift?" he said lightly. He moved upwards and then drifted down beside her and switched off his gravstrap. She had never been close to him before and his presence was so vital that she almost backed away from him.

Calax and Velusi were talking, seating themselves on the opposite couch. They nodded to her and continued their conversation.

"I think you know me," she said. "Fastina Cahmin."

"Aha—my female nemesis—not so odd as the male. You've caught up with me at last." He was looking at her with curiosity. "Do you know a pale man who wears dark clothes and holds his head in a peculiar way?"

"I don't think so," she frowned. What does he think

of me? she thought. She had to make a good impression. Perhaps she had been wrong to do this. She smiled. "I wanted to make you a proposal. I want to know if you'll marry me?"

He seemed relieved. "I had an idea it was something of the sort. But you must know my reputation—I like women very much, but I've never found one I've wanted to marry. What can you offer me?"

"Very little besides myself. Can I share your company for a few days—see what comes of it?"

"It would be impolite to refuse—but you know that I'm involved in something very important to me. Something much more important than sex, or even love. I am a happy man, Fastina. There is only one thing that mars my happiness, and I'm afraid that it is becoming the dominant factor of my life."

"Will you tell me what it is?"

"No."

"Well, are you going to be impolite? Refuse me my chance?"

He smiled. "No. I am staying at Narvo's house for the time being. You can come and stay with me there if you wish—though I'll be busy most of the time."

She felt elated and she felt confident. Without realising it, she had sensed a weakness in him—a weakness that she could employ to keep him.

The car was moving away from the Flower Forest, passing over the occasional house or village. There were no social centres, now, no conurbations, simply the vast underground computer network and the villages or houses surrounded by gardens, mountains, lakes and forests, where a man and his friends or family could land their buildings in the scenery they preferred. Calax's house was situated at the moment close to Lake Tanganyika in what had once been known as the continent of Africa.

Soon she could see the lake ahead, a sheet of bright steel flanked by hills and forests, the sun hot and the air still as the car drifted down to land on the mosaic roof of the tall house.

Clovis helped her out—gentle, civilised, but with an odd look in his eyes that did not seem at all civilised, as if he stared into some secret part of her that she did not know existed, some organ that she possessed which, if inspected, would tell of her real ambitions and her future. She thought of him, at that moment, as an ancient, sombre shaman in his dark clothes, who might cut the organ from her, steaming in the still air, to make some unholy divination. He smiled a quiet smile as he gestured for her to precede him into the gravishute which gaped in the centre of the roof. Dropping into it, she felt as if she were condemning herself to an irrevocable destiny, and she savoured the idea until they were standing on the balcony of Narvo's main room, drinking cocktails and admiring the view over the lake.

Clovis was saying: "Well, Barre, you're as adamant as ever, ah? You colonials are of tougher stuff than us."

Though Barre spoke good-humouredly, his voice had something of the timbre of the machines he had lived with and by all his life. "Not tougher, Clovis—perhaps more realistic. Certainly less romantic. I might even say that you Earth people are in love with the idea of your own extinction—it's still remote enough."

Clovis smiled. "It may be true of many, but not of me. Death, decay of any kind horrifies me."

Barre laughed. "Oh, horrified, are you? I sometimes think that the self-control that you folk pride yourselves on has resulted in the atrophy of your emotions. You are so *civilised*. You might not be human at all in any real sense."

"The emotion's there, Barre—we don't let it cloud our minds or spoil our behaviour. We still have our artists, you know, to prove it."

"I have my suspicions of most of them—they don't do anything for me."

"Not even Alodios?"

"Alodios is good, yes—but didn't he disappear some time ago? They said he left Earth. Now he is a giant. Born out of his time for most of you. Too rich, judging by some of the recent criticisms I've seen."

"And too romantic? You can't have it both ways."

Fastina, also an admirer of Alodios, whose composite 'novels' of music, prose, poetry, paintings and mobiles dominated the art world, said: "Did you ever meet him, Clovis? I've always liked his early stuff—like *Cheerless Ben Evazah* and *Seasons By Request*—but I've found his later stuff difficult—obscure—nothing to help you key-in to what he's thinking."

"I never met him. I sent several invitations; asking if I could visit him when those failed, but he keeps himself to himself. I wonder where he is now."

Narvo was looking out over the lake. He said: "*I stand on the shores of death, where there is no ocean—Only an eternal dropping away.*" He turned. "That's Alodios, I think. Something from one of his early pieces."

The setting sun seemed to deepen the lines on his face and Fastina suddenly felt sorry for him, realising for the first time the full implications of the Earth's impending fate.

Velusi's dining room was not large. Its walls were ornamented by abstract frescoes, reminiscent of Mayan art. A somewhat ornate room, not to Fastina's taste. Beyond the now-transparent walls, she could see the dark glitter of the lake, with a huge moon hanging over it. It was very peaceful.

They ate and talked of many things—of the meeting, of the issues and personalities involved, and they talked of old problems solved, as they hoped to solve this one. But though they spoke a great deal, Fastina felt a little uncomfortable, as if she were an intruder. Secondly, she could not easily forget the sense of anticipation that dominated her, and she began to resent the presence of Velusi and Calax, wishing that she and Clovis could be alone.

At length Clovis got up. As yet he hadn't told Narvo that Fastina wished to stay, but now he said: "Narvo—you've no objection if Fastina spends a few days here?"

The old man smiled. "Of course not. You're welcome." But she felt again that she'd intruded, that her being here lessened the time that Velusi could spend with his

friend. Yet, she told herself fatalistically, there was nothing she could do about it.

Narvo and Barre Calax had rooms near to the ground, but Clovis had chosen a room near the top of the building, so they took their leave of one another in the dining room.

After Narvo and Barre Calax had dropped down the gravishute, Clovis and Fastina went up it. The shute opened directly on to Clovis's room, but as he drew level with the entrance, Clovis frowned.

"The lights are out," he said. "Surely Narvo hasn't removed the lamps without telling me..."

Fastina thought that she heard a note of tension in his voice. He caught the grip by the side of the entrance, clasping her arm with his other hand. They entered his room.

Surprised, she saw the silhouette of a man against the transparent wall. A man who held his head in a peculiar way.



In a world without crime, locks and alarms did not exist so that the man could have entered the room when and how he chose. And he was guilty of a crime—an invasion of privacy at very least.

This wasn't what shocked Marca so much as his recognition of the man. He paused by the gravishute entrance, still gripping Fastina's arm.

"What do you want here?" he said.

The figure didn't move, didn't speak.

For the first time in his adult life, Clovis Marca let his emotions get the better of him. Anger and fear shook his body as he released his hold on Fastina's arm and plunged across the room towards the dark figure.

"This time I'm getting my explanation," he said, reaching out to grasp the man.

The intruder moved just before Clovis's hands touched him. He moved rapidly—faster than it should have been possible for a man to move—towards the gravishute. But Fastina blocked the entrance with her body. He veered aside and stood stock still again. Then he spoke, his voice melodious and deep.

"You will never be able to touch me, Clovis Marca. Let me leave here. I mean you no harm, I hope."

"No harm—you're driving me insane with this pursuit. Who are you—what do you want from me?"

"My name, so far as it matters, is Take."

"Take—a good name for a thief."

"I did not come here to steal anything from you. I merely wished to confirm something."

"What?"

"To confirm what I guessed you are looking for."

"Be quiet!" Clovis looked at Fastina.

"You are ashamed?" asked Take.

"No, but it doesn't suit me to reveal what I'm looking for—and I'm not sure you know."

"I know."

Then Take had leapt to where Fastina stood, pushed her gently aside and jumped into the gravishute, so swiftly that it was impossible to follow his movements.

Clovis ran across the room and followed him into the gravishute. Above him he heard Take's voice calling

a warning.

"You are a fool, Marca—what you seek is not worth the finding!"

Reaching the roof, Clovis saw a small carriage taking off. He ran towards Narvo's car before he realised that Narvo had the only subsonic key. He had left his own craft at the spacefield when Narvo had picked him up. He watched the car disappear over the mountains and he breathed rapidly, deliberately relaxing his body and regaining control of himself.

Fastina now came on to the roof and stood beside him.

"I'm sorry I couldn't stop him. He moved too quickly. Have you ever seen a man move as fast as that? How does he do it? You've seen him before? I have, too—on several of the planets you were on. Is that what you meant when you mentioned your male nemesis?"

He nodded. "I must find out where he comes from—where he's staying on Earth. There's still some organisation left. It shouldn't take long."

"He isn't from Earth, is he? There's something about him..."

Clovis knew what she meant.

She smiled. "He couldn't be in love with you, too, could he?"

Then Clovis knew there was only one means of forgetting the enigmatic Take, for a while at least—only one means of relaxing. He turned and grasped Fastina, pulling her towards him, bending her head back to kiss her, pushing his hands over her body, feeling her arms circle him and her nails dig into his back as she gasped:

"Oh, Clovis! Oh, you *stallion*!"

t h r e e

Memento Mori

THE SHIP CAME silently down. It landed on the deserted field in the cool dawn. It was a big, complex ship of a golden plastic alloy that was turned to deep red

by the rising sun. It landed in a faint whisper of sound, a murmur of apology, as if aware that its presence was unwelcome.

Three figures started forward over the yielding surface of the spacefield. In the distance, to their right, were the abandoned hangars and control rooms of the field, slim buildings of pale yellow and blue.

The voice in Clovis's ear-bead said: "Shall we open up?"

"You might as well," he said.

As they reached the circular ship, the lock began to open, twenty feet above them. They paused, listening—listening for a familiar sound, a sick sound they didn't want to hear.

They didn't hear it.

Drifting up on their gravstraps, they paused at the open airlock. Clovis looked at Fastina. "We know what to expect—you don't. Are you sure—?"

"Yes."

Narvo Velusi pursed his lips. "Let's go in." The old man led the way through the airlock into a short passage.

The first body was there. It was a woman's body. It was naked, contorted and it stank. The grey flesh was filthy, the hair matted, the upturned face was twisted, the eyes wide, lips snarling back from the teeth, the cheeks hollow. The flesh showed signs of laceration and the woman's fingernails seemed imbedded in her right breast.

Fastina turned away. "I didn't realise—" She went quickly back. "I'll be outside."

Clovis sighed. "Jara Feraz, I think, Narvo. Twelve years conditioning, training..." He shuddered as he drifted over the body. "Less than six months out—and this."

The ship was silent. In the main control cabin they found two others. A man's body lay over a woman's and she seemed to be embracing him, the rictus of her mouth giving her the appearance of revelling in some obscene joy, though Clovis guessed she had been trying to ward the man off. The remains of the other three

were also there—bones. Some of the bones had been gnawed, some split. Face grim, Narvo operated the door to the galley. He glanced inside.

"Enough supplies for at least another eighteen months," he said. "We made the controls of everything simple enough, in case this should happen. All they had to do was break the seals on the packs."

"But they didn't. You'd think they'd retain *some* survival instincts, however primitive."

"Isn't that a definition of madness, Clovis—something which makes you act against your natural instincts? Look—that's how we lost contact." He pointed at the smashed cameras above. Their protective cases had been torn open. Everything breakable had been broken. Machinery was twisted, papers torn, streamers of micro-tape programmes were scattered everywhere.

Clovis picked up a length and waved it. "The party's over," he said. "I don't think they enjoyed it."

Narvo shook his head. "All those tests, all those years of training them, conditioning them, all the precautions we took. They were intelligent people, Clovis—they knew what to expect and how to fight it. They had courage, initiative, common sense and fantastic self-control—yet in six months they become insane, bestial—travesties—grotesque animals, more debased than we can guess—" He glanced at the wall in which the galley door was set. He pointed at the pictures drawn on it in what could have been human blood. "That sort of thing comes early. We can't get out of the galaxy, Clovis. We should have realised it before we began the project. None of this crew was born on Earth—but their grandparents were. How many generations would it take?"

"There's only another to go," Clovis said.

Narvo rubbed his face. "Shall we revive one? We could do it for about ten minutes if they're not too far gone."

"No." The word was long drawn out, hollow. "No—this is enough. If they haven't got at the recorders, they should tell us what happened."

"We don't really need to check. Do we?"

Clovis nodded slowly.

They left the ship.

The bead in Clovis's ear said: "Any instructions?"

"Destruct," said Clovis.

As they got into their car on the edge of the field, they saw the golden ship crumple, saw the flash, heard the sharp smacking sound as it was vapourized.

Fastina was pale. "You should have told Barre Calax to have taken tomorrow's ship back to Ganymede instead of today's," she said. "If he'd seen that body, he'd have changed his mind."

"Perhaps," said Clovis. He felt chilled. He shivered, trying hard to stop himself.

It was no good, he thought. It was no good, he couldn't take that. The cold flesh, the stink of decay, the uselessness of it all. Somewhere he'd find what he wanted. He could be close. There had been hints. Oh, yes, it was every man for himself now.

Narvo was saying: "I promised to publish my idea today."

"Your idea?"

"Yes—the project to replace this one. You know—the message."

Clovis nodded absently.

"Where did you cut out?" Narvo smiled. "I'm sorry, Clovis. I suppose I'm babbling."

The warm sun had risen. They passed over green hills and valleys, heard the sound of birds, were narrowly missed by a veering air carriage from which a young man yelled a happy Good Morning.

Clovis stretched back on the couch, his stomach feeling contracted, his mind confused, unsuccessfully trying to get rid of the impressions of the last hour. Twisted faces, contorted bodies, filth, wreckage, bones.

Bones. *Memento mori* that Earth could do without at this time; that *he* could do without in particular. Most of them didn't realise what death was, didn't realise how important it was, how terrible. Finish. No more thinking, no more feeling—just an eternal falling away and then nothing at all. *No!* Yet he himself, in his farewell speech when the government resigned, and

later at the Great Glade, had comforted them, told them to be philosophical, to get as much from life as they could, since they would be the last to have the opportunity. We must resign ourselves to the inevitable . . . A stupid cliché and he had not even meant it. *You must resign yourselves.*

As for him, the awareness of nearing extinction had brought him a goal. He could have no sons and daughters now. He needed something else. And he would find it. He *would* find it, though he could do nothing with it when he had it. His ambition was senseless, pointless, ridiculous, it made him ridiculous, a clown. The world which admired him would laugh at him if it knew what he sought. He was not sufficiently detached to laugh at himself. He had to follow his obsession—it was his master. He would follow it, in spite of everything. Madness, as dark as any that had come to the crew of the ship, nibbled on the edges of his brain. It was clouded, it was marred. *You are a fool, Marca—what you seek is not worth the finding!* Did Take know? If Take knew what he sought, how could Take judge whether it was worth finding or not?

Take? It wasn't a natural name. It sounded wrong. Who was he? How could he have guessed? Marca's questions had been guarded. No-one could have realised what he was after. A casual inquiry here, an odd remark there—and he had been sure the rumour was true—there *was* a man somewhere who could help him. A recluse, a scientist, perhaps on one of the Bleak Worlds . . . Did Take have that information? Even if Take was a good telepath, Marca would have been aware that his mind was being intruded upon. Though, of course, if Take was looking for the same thing, he may easily have reached the right conclusion. But then Take would not have said that it wasn't worth it—not unless he had failed in his own ambition—the same as Marca's—and then decided. Well he would not fail . . .

Ah, it was stupid. He'd have Take investigated, find out where he was from, have his movements traced, have him found on Earth and then have it out with him. Then he'd know. It would be simple.

The carriage was dropping towards the roof of Narvo's house.

He must improve his manners. He'd forgotten all about Narvo's scheme. Yet the scheme seemed so divorced from anything Marca felt. He was becoming selfish.

As they landed, he said: "When do you intend to publish your idea, Narvo?"

"Later today, as I said." Narvo gave him a sympathetic look, probably thinking that he was finding it hard to recover from the experience of seeing the interior of the ship. Well, in a sense he was right. "As soon as enough people have assembled in the Great Glade."

"I'll come along. Tell me, is Yoluf still in touch with the Information Centre?"

"He still goes there. He can't get used to being out of a job. He can't bear not knowing everything that goes on everywhere. The information still comes in—though many of the out-system planets are becoming rather lax about sending theirs. What is it you want?"

Marca hadn't told Narvo about Take's intrusion. He said: "That man I asked you about at the party. I want to know where he's staying."

"The one you think followed you? Well, I expect Yoluf will be able to help. Shall I ask him over?"

"No, it's all right—if he's still at the Information Centre, I'll go there. It will be easier. I'll call him."

Fastina said: "Would it be rude if I went to bed? I'm tired and..."

Clovis shook his head and Narvo said: "Of course not. If you need the tranquo..."

She laughed. "I may do. I'll tell you."

They dropped into the gravishute. Clovis stopped himself at his room and helped her into the room. It was dark. Clovis touched the control on the wall and it became transparent.

He still didn't know why Take had come here, what he had wanted, why the lights should have been disconnected. Unless, of course, Take had needed a power source for some reason. That could mean...

As Fastina sat on the edge of the bed, tugging at her clothes in a detached way, he went to his tapecase. It

was a small, flat case containing his private records. The sonic lock had been sliced off. Take had used a powered tool to do the cutting, probably a laser scalpel which required more power than could be condensed into a normal portable pack. Which was why he'd had to disconnect the lights.

Clovis immediately saw what Take had been looking at. One capsule of microtape was unravelled. Slipping it into the viewer on his wrist, he saw that it was the capsule containing his star charts—his probable courses plotted on them. So now Take knew the next stage of his journey—and could be there ahead of him if he chose. It was uncertain why Take had troubled to find his charts—and copy them probably. Take's actions pointed to one kind of answer, his words to another.

Fastina was still very pale. He remembered the night and felt guilty. He went over to the bed and helped her undress.

"What's the matter? Just tiredness and shock, or . . ."

"Probably," she smiled. "Don't worry—a bit of sleep will do me good. You've worn me out."

I can't worry, he thought, *I can't, my dear. I warned you.* Yet admittedly he was impressed by both her personality and her love-making.

There was no point to it any more, though! However it deviated, it was still basically the urge to breed, to pass on the seed—an urge to continue life through your children. Now there was no point to it. He'd have to tell her politely, when he was calmer and she was better.

But the body did not know. The unthinking body could not realise that there was to be no future, no seed to be passed on, no kind of immortality. The cycle—which the body still accepted as eternal—was going to be broken at last. As in ancient Pompeii, even when the mind received the full realisation of death, the body ignored it and continued to pump out its believe in the future. To the body, the idea that there could be no future was impossible. You could convey other ideas to the body and it would put them into practice—but how could it express the final shutting-off, the close-down?

Death? Oh, no, merely a transformation from one

state to another.

Clovis shivered and Fastina looked surprised.

He got up. "I must contact Yoluf."

"How will you stop Take if he decides to leave?"

"I don't know. I'll try force if I have to." What other way was there of restraining his enemy in a world without police, military or even weapons?

f o u r

We Are Here!

YOLUF WAS A tall, slim man in middle age. He had very fair hair and a pale, anaemic face, pale blue eyes and, in contrast to the rest, very full red lips that looked painted.

Yoluf sat at his complex control board surrounded by monitor screens. He was wearing a high-collared orange shirt and black tights. He sat back in his chair and spread his long hands in apology.

"No trace yet, Clovis." His voice was extraordinarily high-pitched.

"You've mentioned that his reflexes are abnormally quick?"

"Didn't you hear me? I gave them all the information you gave me. We need a passport system like the old days—banning them was one of your laws wasn't it Clovis? I've always been against that ban. To hell with the freedom of the individual—how am I supposed to run an information centre without a decent system?"

Clovis smiled a little. "You're a frustrated bureaucrat."

"We wouldn't be where we are today without them, Clovis," Yoluf wagged a finger. "It was your civil servants who helped turn over the State from its old restrictive form into its present one... But this friend of yours hasn't been noticed in any of my sectors. There are no strange ships in orbit. He could be hiding out on the Moon perhaps—I haven't had all reports from there yet."

Clovis sighed. "If others hadn't seen him I'd begin to think I was imagining him. But I'm sure he's on

Earth. Have you checked all ships on the fields?"

"It's hard—they come and go. Mainly shuttles, of course, but since the big news came out a lot more people have been arriving from the outer planets to spend as much time on Earth as possible."

"I see. You can't blame them. Have all passenger ships been checked—was his name on any list?"

"Take was the nearest we could find, and he turned out to be an ex-Inspector of Mines coming home out of a job. That decision of yours to wind up the government and almost all its departments didn't meet with everyone's approval you know—not in my branch of the service in particular."

"We said people could continue with their work if they wanted to."

"It's not the same, Clovis. Not the same. Where's yesterday's smooth-running machine? Bits—bits without links or a motor." He sighed. "Now if the machine were running again, it wouldn't take us more than a few minutes to find friend Take."

He turned as a light blinked above a monitor and a face appeared on the screen. The colours were in bad register and the man's face was a dirty green.

"This will be from the Moon," Yoluf said pointing at the screen. "See that colour—we can't get a mechanic to fix it. I'm telling you, Clovis, your decision will result in chaos—anarchy—within the next couple of years. There won't be anyone alive by the time that galaxy—" The signal buzzed and Yoluf flicked a switch on his panel. "Yes?"

The man on the screen was already talking. "—no information regarding the man Take. No one of his description or name has landed here, though we haven't checked below surface yet. Some of the old mine pits are deep enough to hide a ship."

Yoluf said belligerently, "Then keep trying," and he broke contact well before the message could get to the Moon. He shook his head at Clovis. "I'm glad you're so desperate to find this man, Clovis—I'm glad because it shows you now how the system's breaking down. Now *you're* suffering..."

Clovis said reasonably: "Yes, it's a good demonstration, but it's really very important that I locate him. Please keep trying."

"We never stop trying. There was a man five or six years ago—Jonis was his name—came into an inheritance—a V-type house, almost brand new—took up thirteen months to locate him. Know where he was? He was four miles underground in a refrigerated suit with enough supplies for two years, charting an old volcano course. We found him—didn't stop trying."

Clovis thought of something else, his conversation of the previous night. "What about Alodios—the novelist—where's he?"

"I know the man you mean—the artist, Alodios. And I know who'd know—unless you're trying to pull a fast one on me, Clovis, trying to get me to trace impossible..." He had pressed a button and an old man appeared on another screen. "Klernit—you're a great fan of Alodios aren't you? What happened to him? Clovis Marca wants to know."

The old man shook his head. "I know where he is—it came in on the register only a few days ago—but if you want to know *why* or *how*..."

"Just *where*, Klernit."

"Well, he went out to the Bleak Worlds—Antares—just suddenly went there. Yes," Klernit mused, "yes, he produced some magnificent pieces, you know—remarkable pieces—"

"Thanks," said Yoluf switching Klernit hastily off. "He tends to ramble. That help you, Clovis?"

"Another mystery? Why should a man like that travel out to the Bleak Worlds? He was closest to Earth than any other man of his time—he was the spirit of this planet, tapped its heart..."

"Born here was he?"

"Never left here as far as I know. It's a puzzle..."

"I don't try to understand artists, Clovis. It's hard enough trying to run this crumbling organisation." A big yellow light began to flash on the largest and central screen. Yoluf looked up in surprise. "Emergency!" he squeaked in delight. "About time we had something."

Good thing you're here." He flipped a switch, adding gloomily, "Not that we've got the set-up to deal with anything. Listen in on this, Clovis—it may be of interest."

The screen was slashed by bright colours which slowly formed a picture. Yoluf frowned. It seemed to be a picture of empty space. "Looks like it's being taken from Neptune by the position of those stars," he said, impatiently, waiting for the sound.

The sound came in, slightly distorted.

"A large unidentified spacecraft is on course for Earth. The design is unfamiliar. It is not an Earth ship. Repeat: It is not an Earth ship..."

"Not an Earth ship—then what is it...?" Yoluf turned to look at Clovis.

Clovis said: "An extraterrestrial ship—a foreign ship. Where's it from—our galaxy, or the invading one?" He was so startled by the news that he sat for a moment without thinking at all. Then he realised he felt angry, resenting the intrusion of the ship. It was visible on the screen now—a tiny luminous blue speck in the black, glistening silence of space.

"It's travelling very rapidly," said Yoluf loudly as the voice from the screen continued to give its data. Neither of the men were listening to it.

For a ship travelling in interplanetary space, its rate was exceptionally fast. It was growing larger on the screen. Clovis was beginning to make out details. It was hard to judge the size, but it gave him the impression of being very big. Its shining blue bulk flickered through space. Now that it was closer, its hull had a lattice effect—a pale blue and slightly darker blue. The pale blue areas could be thousands of portholes, or outsides camera lenses. It was almost a perfect square with rounded corners and—unlike the heavily ornate Earth craft—seemed devoid of any non-functional design, unless the different shades of blue formed some sort of pattern.

With a feeling of depression, Clovis watched the strange ship move through space, the picture changing from screen to screen as the cameras followed it.

"It's definitely heading for Earth," the voice said.

Clovis got up.

"Shall I put out a message?" Yoluf said eagerly.

"No," said Clovis. "No. Not yet, Yoluf."

Damn! he thought as he left the Information Centre. What do they want with us? Mutual commiseration? I'll be expected to deal with them, of course. Too many random factors cropping up. Take, the girl, and now this ship. I'm being slowed down—and I can't afford to be.

Then he thought: It could be an invasion ship. But he rejected the idea. What would be the point of invasion in the present situation? No point. Logical minds must have built that ship and they must realise that there would be no point. Then he wondered again: Alien minds—strange minds—unhuman minds. Damn! He didn't want this. He wanted to finish what he'd started, nothing else.

He got into his aircar and made for the Great Glade, his much-admired mind sick with confused thoughts.

In the Great Glade, Narvo said to Fastina: "I'm sorry that Clovis couldn't get here in time. I'll just have to make the announcement anyway."

Almost every available seat was being used. Fastina looked around her. Tier upon tier of seats rising upwards in a great semi-circle, the multicoloured clothing of the people looking like a fantastic mosaic. And above them, shading the arena, the neatly parked aircars, as varied in colouring as the costumes of their owners.

Narvo glanced at the young mediator who stroked his moustache and nodded. Narvo mounted the dais and began to speak.

"This morning we inspected the last intergalactic ship," he said slowly. "Its passengers were all death. They were in a similar state to those who went out in the previous ships. We expected nothing else." He paused.

"Therefore I have this to suggest to you—to our race—that we should build a gigantic transmitter far larger than anything we have ever built before. By

means of this transmitter we can send out a message to the universe. A message that will travel forever. A message that will survive after we have perished and will tell any intelligences there may be that the human race once lived."

"What is the message?" several voices asked.

"Simply this: *We Are Here!*"

Narvo looked around the tiers of seats. There was no immediate reaction from the assembly—just a rustling, a stirring, a murmuring as the words were repeated.

"*We Are Here!*" called Narvo. "We will shout it through eternity. A message that will be picked up by all manner of creatures—perhaps some will be like us. It will convey our pride in our existence—in the accident that made us reason."

Most of the assembly had now caught some of his enthusiasm. Fastina smiled, admiring the old man's simplicity, his idealism—his nobility. Though logically his suggestion seemed odd and pointless, emotionally it meant a great deal to her and, she could see, to the rest of the assembly. The words and the idea went below the ordinary conscious levels of their minds and struck a chord.

"*We Are Here!*"

Now the voices changed from a murmur to a shout as the words were repeated like a war cry. Some wept, some laughed, some had rapt expressions that Fastina found indescribable, as if the people had sensed a vision, some truth that was so pure that it shocked them.

What was it that Narvo had said that conjured up such strong emotions?

We Are Here—the words seemed to open up a vision in her, also—a vision she could not define. She wept with those who wept, she laughed with those who laughed.

And her face was the face of a saint.

No need for experiments, no need for ships and the waste of men. No need for wild parties. No need to forget. The race had found an aim. It was going to create something that would outlast itself. It was going to achieve its immortality after all.

Rich

THE ATMOSPHERE AT the Great Glade startled Clovis Marca more than he had been startled by the news of the alien ship. There was an air of profound happiness here . . .

As he drifted down and saw the unexpected expressions on people's faces, heard the great warm wash of sound without hearing the words, he wondered if perhaps the news of the ship had proceeded him. But why should the news receive such an odd reception?

He saw Narvo Velusi's old face smiling, saw the white-maned head nodding, the hand waving, the eyes shining. And then Fastina—she looked so beautiful that he felt afraid. Whatever he learned, nothing would ever explain Fastina's expression. It was too big. Too big.

He tried to remember Narvo's scheme. A message. A big broadcast through space. That could not be it, surely. The idea had been idealistic, certainly, but pointless. As he landed, he made out the words.

"WE ARE HERE!"

So *it was* Narvo's scheme that had affected them. And he, Clovis Marca, humanitarian, philosopher, man of good will, respected First Citizen of Earth, was completely unimpressed.

He sat down. His face was blank and stiff, his body rigid. What had happened to him? What had he become? Was he so changed that an idea that could sway the rest of humanity left him unmoved?

Clovis Marca felt ashamed at first. Then he felt angry at himself, and shocked. That expression on Fastina's face—whatever emotion it was she felt, it dwarfed any personal vision he might have, any emotion he might experience. All this went through him swiftly until he was calm again.

I will go on with it, he told himself coldly. *I will go on with it in spite of everything.* But even as he made the decision, he realised that he had irrevocably lost

something and with the losing of it he knew that he would never understand what it was. Never again.

He got up then and he spoke in a very calm voice. "May I speak?"

Slowly they quieted, but he could sense their exhilaration still. They silenced their shout in respect to him, their First Citizen. Noble Clovis Marca who deserved their sympathy though they did not know it.

He was still polite, still civilised, still the man of integrity and strength.

"I am sincerely sorry to interrupt you—I realise the impact that Narvo's message has had on you—I share your enthusiasm—"

Fastina and Narvo turned to look at him then. They gave him a faintly puzzled look. They had caught something in his tone, perhaps, or his choice of words.

"I share your enthusiasm—but there is more news." He waited for a moment, feeling barren. The only fire that drove him was that of his ambition. No longer was he moved by love, hatred, desire of any kind, but one—one desire, the desire he must keep secret or lose the respect of them all. And he still needed that respect, must use it, for they would help him so long as they did not realise what it was he sought.

"There is more news," he repeated, forcing himself to continue coherently. "A ship has been sighted coming towards Earth. It is an extraterrestrial ship—that is a non-human ship . . ."

The assembly received the news with excited interest, but not with the same stunned emotion with which he had received it. The assembly was moved, certainly, but not sufficiently. He wanted them to hate the intrusion of the ship as much as he did. He called: "An alien ship," and then, against his better judgment. "It could even be an invasion craft."

But this did not alarm them.

Yulof's voice came in his earbead. "The ship's landing, Clovis. It's landing in the sea off the coast of Sector 1005—the American West Coast."

"The ship is landing in the sea," Clovis said. He told them where.

Narvo slapped him on the shoulder. "Now I know what's troubling you. Don't worry, Clovis, it can't be an enemy—and even if it were we couldn't do much against it—we've no warships. Come on, let's go and greet it."

Laughing and calling to one another the assembly members broke up, making for their cars, rising into the air like a great flock of excited birds.

"Which carriage shall we use?" Narvo asked. "Yours or mine?"

"It's all right," Clovis said. "You and Fastina go in yours and I'll go in mine."

Again Narvo gave him that slightly puzzled glance, then accepted his statement.

Fastina said gaily: "What a day, Clovis! What a *rich* day!"

"Ah, yes," he murmured. "Rich."

He went up to his car, fingering the keyboard of his subsonic whistle to give the car its directions. As it started off, he looked down at the colourful blossoms of the trees, at the empty glade, and he felt empty too.

The cars were streaming away all around him. He moved with them, but apart from them, slightly above and to one side. They moved like a huge school of tropical fish, a horde of scintillating craft bearing their stimulated, emotion-drunk passengers towards the sea.

Soon they could see it in the distance, partially immersed in the sea. The bright sun gleamed on the green, shiny water, on the white beach and the brown cliffs—and on the pale-blue and dark-blue checks of the ship. The smell of brine was strong.

What remained above sea-level looked like a huge blue box with rounded corners, the size of a large building. The sea foamed around it as the cars began to arrive and hover expectantly.

The image of the flock of birds persisted as the cars swooped and wheeled like gulls about the ship, their occupants calling to one another.

Then a large oblong section of the roof opened and tall, yellow bipeds stepped out to stand looking up

at the welcoming party.

They were, in a way, bird-like, too.

There were four of them; obviously two males and two females.

They stood about eight feet high and had very lean, angular bodies.

Their skins were a bright yellow, tinged with green.

Their heads were rather like eggs set on their sides, balanced on thin necks.

Their plumage was very bright—red, blue and purple with green crests on their strange, oval heads. The females had long, sweeping tail feathers that reached to the ground, but the darker-skinned males had a kind of collar of feathers around the throat.

The head tapered to a hard-looking beak-like muzzle in which the nostrils and the long, down-curved mouth were set.

The eyes were very large and blank and did not blink.

Arriving behind the others, Clovis was in time to see the visitors raise their arms—three slender fingers and what seemed to be two thumbs on each hand—and signal to one of the nearest aircars.

In spite of his resentment towards them, Clovis now felt curious enough to speed close to the ship in order to study them.

Then one of the aliens spoke. Clovis could faintly hear his piping voice. The crowd became silent, listening to the strange tones that were reminiscent of the language of dolphins.

Evidently they don't know Earthish, thought Clovis, moving closer. He heard Narvo yell at him:

"Clovis—you ought to be the first to speak to them!"

He looked for his friend and saw him hanging over the side of his aircar, waving at him from above.

"What shall I say?" He tried to smile, to speak lightly. "I certainly don't know their language."

"We ought to say *something* in reply—to be polite."

What I want to say it not polite, thought Clovis. "Welcome visitors from space," he began laconically. The aliens cocked their heads to listen to him, rather in the manner of cockatoos. "We of Earth greet you

and offer you hospitality."

The aliens continued to cock their heads, but he refused to say any more.

Now that he was facing the problem of communicating with them, he became more interested. He knew what to do. "Telepaths!" he cried. "Is there anyone here who is a good telepath? Volunteers to try and make contact with these people!"

Four voices answered affirmatively, and four aircars moved towards where Clovis hovered close to the aliens at their eye-level. In one of the cars was dark-faced Andros Almer whom Clovis recognised as Fastina's ex-lover. He nodded to him and then spoke to all of them. As well as Almer, there was a thin, fresh-faced girl, a bulky man in a green quilted coat with pale features, and a young man in a flamboyant hat and flaming red jacket.

"Presumably these people wish to communicate with us and won't resent any attempt to make telepathic contact. We don't know, of course, if they know about telepathy, but if they're as advanced as they seem, they'll probably understand its principal. One at a time, I want you to attempt a tentative contact, see what results we get. He pointed at the girl. "Would you like to begin?"

She nodded. "I need a mild trance—so don't be alarmed. I'll try one of the females—there's probably a better chance."

The aliens watched with interest as the girl stared hard at the tallest female. They watched as the girl's eyes seemed to go out of focus and then close. She sat rigidly by the side of her car, her lips moving a little. Clovis switched his attention to the alien female. Her crest rose stiffly and her tail feathers rustled. Evidently the girl was having some sort of success.

The girl began to speak at the same moment as the alien closed her own eyes.

"It's strange—strange..." her voice sounded distant. "*Reds and blacks—stars—pleasure—curiosity—love, is is it? Huge butterflies of gold and green, waves of purple, memory of fear, reds and blacks, reds and blacks... golden butterflies... globes—blue—no, not blue, not blue*

—it must be blue . . . Shafts of indigo fire, yellow men with bright features—A PICTURE, that was a picture—no, I lost it—more colours, mingling colours, like paint swirling across space—hope, tension, excitement, pleasure, curiosity, joy—lilac seas . . .”

Almer spoke to Clovis. “With due respect, Clovis, this isn’t helping much. The young lady is obviously mainly sensitive to colour-impressions and emotions. The emotions are probably linked with the colours, at that. We need a more logical mind—more objective—someone able to link words and ideas together and get an inkling of their language. Once we’ve got the basics of the language we can let the computers take over and we’ll be able to converse in a few hours.”

“I agree,” said Clovis, but instead of letting Almer try, he gusted at the bulky man. “Would you like to attempt contact now—perhaps with a male?”

The bulky man nodded. He stared hard at one of the males. The male stared back into his eyes. The alien seemed to get an idea of what was happening and seemed ready to co-operate.

The bulky man spoke in a very matter-of-fact tone, although his voice had something of an edge to it.

“It’s very odd. I’m getting patterns, mainly. Geometric patterns in sharp colours—triangles and circles—now some sort of pentagram—there’s an idea of machinery there, too—big machinery—some huge ship, perhaps—bigger than the one they came in—a planet—yes, a planet and a vast machine I think.”

Almer said pettishly. “Why don’t you let me try, Clovis—I’m sure I could get something more positive than this.”

Clovis remained obstinant. He nodded towards the young man. “You try now—try the same male.”

The boy moved his aircar in as the bulky man moved his out. He, too, stared into the tall alien’s eyes.

“I can see what he meant—geometric patterns on an enormous scale—possible they’re numerals—an equation of some kind? And a planet—and machinery—and—is that our galaxy? Yes, I think so—and from the way it’s seen, I’d say they’re from the invading galaxy.

But now there's a sense of really big distances—moving away from the galaxies—a huge white cloud—very precise patterns—feeling of length and breadth—they're three dimensional—don't understand . . . ”

Almer was impatient: “Look, Clovis—I'm more experienced in this kind of thing. Don't forget the experiments I've done with animals. I'm sure I can get better results.”

Clovis shrugged. “Very well, go ahead.” He was beginning to feel exhausted. What did the symbols and the emotions mean? They seemed incoherent, without logic. Of course there were difficulties—lack of mutual metaphors to begin with—but if the aliens realised what was happening why didn't they think of more specific symbols? He was tired, he decided, and annoyed at the time this encounter was consuming. He would have to set off, soon, to where he'd heard of the scientist who could help him—in the Bleak Worlds that circled Antares, where Earth's outcasts lived if they could bear it. Usually they came back after little more than a year, but some managed to hang on for longer, by means of drugs and wired-up bodies and brains.

Almer's face was calm and he didn't look directly into the alien's eyes, but at a stop just above his crest. He said nothing at first, and then the alien spoke.

“Tiii-y-y-oooo . . . ”

Almer repeated the word as best he could. “It might mean—not sure—maybe the personal pronoun.” The alien continued to speak. Obviously Almer was able to make comparisons quickly and learn the fundamentals of the language by influencing the alien's mind with his own thoughts. This was difficult and not much practised on Earth. But it was getting results now. More words came from the alien and Almer groped slowly for their meanings. He paused for a moment to shout: “Somebody had better record this,” and then went on with the experiment.

As recording equipment was brought up, Almer began to attempt translating some of the simpler alien words. It was taking time.

After an hour he had the words for the personal



pronoun, the ship, a planet, the idea of intelligence, the concept of destruction and a word that might mean 'powerful engines,' the name of the aliens' home and where it was.

He established that they came from the rogue galaxy and perhaps had a plan that might help Earth—though it might only be some kind of philosophy to prepare the human race for the end, he wasn't sure—there seemed to be something more specific, but it was taking time.

By two hours, Almer had managed to get a basic vocabulary of some sixty words, plus words for abstract ideas. He was sweating heavily and under a big strain. At length, he sat back, shaking his head. "That will have to do for the time—I need to relax before I can continue." He looked triumphantly at Clovis who was slumped on his couch. "I think we're getting somewhere, though, eh?"

Clovis nodded.

Narvo said: "Come—everybody to my house—we'll continue last night's party—we've got a great deal to celebrate."

Clovis cursed Narvo. Everything was conspiring against him to stop him being alone with himself for enough time to collect his thoughts and begin to think and act with more coherence. And he couldn't afford to offend anyone yet—not until he had what he wanted, and then it wouldn't matter.

There was no other way out, he decided. He would have to return to space. He had come back because his body and mind had felt as if they were being torn apart by his prolonged absence from Earth, but he would have to find more strength, forego his rest and begin the journey again. There was another factor that helped inspire this decision—Take knew where he planned to go. With luck, Take would remain on Earth, thinking that Clovis would need a longer rest, and that would give him the chance to get ahead of Take and lose him once and for all.

Yes, he would leave Earth, head for the Bleak Worlds.

The aliens were climbing into Narvo's car. The horde of craft began to move over the sea, heading for the African continent and Narvo's house on Lake Tanganyika.

He joined the cavalcade, a feeling of intense desperation growing in him as he remembered the aching desolation of space and contemplated another miserable voyage—but a voyage that might mean the culmination of his ambition.

s i x

Two Kinds of Salvation

FROM THE HALL below came the noise of the new party. Clovis lay in the dark, stretched out on his bed, his hands behind his head. He was half-asleep, half-dreaming. Two principal emotions were at work within him, conflicting—waves of excitement and waves of sadness.

He tried to forget the sense of loss, the increasing

self-hatred, the uselessness of his ambitions, but he could not rid himself entirely of these feelings. The habit of service to his fellows was still strong, yet it had to be denied if he was to achieve what he wanted. Perhaps then he could resume his old life?

Yet he knew instinctively that he might never resume it, for in finding the thing he sought, he would have to sacrifice his earlier virtues.

He liked his old self better, he admitted, but his new self would accomplish more.

When at length Fastina sought him out, he could see that she was slightly drunk. Now that he had made up his mind what he would do, he could afford to allow his affection for her to manifest itself. He smiled at her as she entered the room.

She lay down beside him, laughing softly, stroking his hair.

"Hello, Clovis."

He smiled and held her hand.

Her mood changed and she said quietly: "You seem worried. Was it something you heard at Yulof's—about Take?"

"No." He held her hand tightly. It wasn't too late. He could change his mind—forget about everything, settle here with her, return to his earlier life—useful work—good friends—a sense of achievement—contentment—complacency. Yes, he had been complacent, they all had. It had taken this knowledge of impending annihilation to rid them of it. This scheme of Narvo's, though, now he considered it—a fine idea. And the aliens—had they some means of helping them—was there a way? No—the forces involved were far too great. The final cataclysm was inevitable. Why should they think they could escape? When an individual was killed he was amazed at his bad luck—and the same would happen to the race. Really monumental bad luck...

Yet he believed that it wasn't the same. A race had immortality, an individual had not, except through the race. But if an individual possessed immortality, then the race continued in him.

He had loved his fellows so much, loved Earth, loved its arts and its pleasures. He had squeezed life of every experience possible, and yet he had preserved his integrity, his humanity. Perhaps he should be content to die? But he wasn't...

He was stirring now, rolling over to kiss Fastina, embracing her in the same savage, hungry way that he embraced his new personality. *I must stay selfish*, he thought—*I must stay this way or lose it all*...

When he stood up naked from the bed, he heard the party in progress below. He felt relaxed and in good humour, felt a return of his old stoicism, his self-control. She swung her legs off the bed and grinned at him, stretching.

"Shall we go down in a moment?" he said.

"If you like."

He crossed into the shower-room, turning the dial and feeling the sting of the warm, chemical-laced water as it washed down his lean body. From there he walked into the drying chamber and let the heated air dry him. Then he went back into his room and pulled a fresh toga over his head. He had selected a white one, with red edging.

"That suits you better than those dark clothes you normally wear," she said, looking at him critically as he combed his hair. He sat down and pulled on his soft, high-heeled boots as she sauntered towards the shower-room.

He paused, noticing something—silence in the hall below. Then one voice speaking. He went over to the amplifier in the corner of the room, switched it on, but only heard the last couple of words—"—is possible!" Then the amplifier roared with the sound of cheering.

People were very excitable today, he thought, as Fastina came into the room again. "What was that?" she said.

"Somebody making an announcement. Your friend Almer, I think."

"He's fond of making announcements. What was it about?"

"I didn't catch it. Will you go down as you are?"

"I won't be in fashion, but still . . ."

They dropped into the gravishute.

Leaving the gravishute at ground-level, they walked quickly along a passage and entered the main hall. People were smiling at one another, talking rapidly.

Clovis heard a woman say: "Will this mean the re-industrialisation of Earth?"

Re-industrialisation? A horrible idea. What called for that, he wondered.

Holding Fastina's hand, he made his way through the crowd until he found Narvo Velusi. The old man was talking to the tall, yellow aliens. Beside him, Andros Almer interpreted.

Cheerfully, Clovis said: "What's all the enthusiasm for?"

Narvo turned. "Clovis—these people—'Shreelians' is the best we can manage—they think they can save us."

Clovis looked closely at the tallest alien. Was it possible? He experienced a sense of profound excitement. Suddenly his whole pattern of ideas broke apart and reformed itself. He felt light-headed as he said: "How?"

"Well, it's complicated—we aren't quite *sure* how they they can do it—but it sounds as if it will work. They're already beginning to put their plan into operation in their home world. As far as we can tell it involves shunting our entire solar system out of the danger area."

Clovis said: "But that isn't possible, Narvo. The gravity . . ."

"Their technology is far in advance of ours. It will mean converting two entire planets—probably Pluto and Mercury—into huge machines that will set up a field of force around the system, producing artificial balance when we move beyond galactic influence. Probably Pluto and Mercury will have to be re-positioned . . ."

Clovis said urgently: "And you are sure they can do it for us?"

"They can't do it—they need all their man-power, as we shall. But they can show us how."

Clovis grinned involuntarily, then let the laughter

come. Narvo looked at him, smiling. "A chance, eh, Clovis? A solution we didn't dare consider!"

"A solution, yes," Clovis laughed. "Salvation—certainly. This does make a difference, Narvo. Oh, yes—a very great difference. But it's salvation in two ways, Narvo. I'm not interested in *our* salvation any more. I'm interested in *mine*!"

"You're speaking nonsense, Clovis." Narvo took his arm sympathetically. "You're still under a strain. Perhaps you had better rest—the world is going to need your leadership again. We must form a government—"

Then Clovis had brushed away Narvo's hand and turned, running through the crowd, following by Narvo's shocked stare. He looked at Fastina:

"Fastina—he must listen to me. Soon the world will be at work—tensions will arise, conflicts over plans—only Clovis can hold us together. He must not desert us? What does he mean?"

"I don't know," she said as she started after him. "Clovis! Clovis! Where are you going?"

Chuckling like a mad-man the First Citizen of Earth darted up the gravishute towards the roof.

He heard her behind him.

"Clovis! Isn't that what you were looking for? Isn't your search over now? You'd hoped to save humanity—and now it has the chance! What's the matter, Clovis? There's no need to go on looking!"

As he reached the roof, he laughed and wheeled round to confront her as she emerged from the shute. She looked at his face and she felt the same shock she had experienced in the intergalactic ship when she had seen the corpse. She stepped backwards, nearly overbalancing into the shute.

"What was I looking for? You've found something—but it isn't what I want. There's no necessity for secrecy now, Fastina—no-one will laugh at my ambition. If their scheme is successful then I shall be the one who will benefit most of all."

"But you heard what Narvo said. They need you now. Without you, the scheme could fail."

"Let them find someone else. I'm going out there. I'm going back into space again—and this time I shall find what I'm looking for." He pointed upwards, grinning. He noticed that he was frightening her and grinned the more.

He stepped towards his aircar and clambered into it. She followed, climbing in after him.

He shook his head rapidly. "No! No, Fastina!"

He turned and picked her up bodily, throwing her back on to the roof. She fell with a cry of pain.

Then he put his sonarkey to his lips and gave the car its instructions.

"Where are you going?" she shouted, lying on the roof, her naked body white against the dark surface. She began to scramble up, sobbing. "Which planet? Clovis—what about your loyalties?"

The last thing she heard was his voice crying back to her as his car sailed over the sky.

"I have only one loyalty now, Fastina. I nearly ignored it. Only one loyalty and it's to my ambition!"

And he laughed and laughed as he headed the car towards the spacefield and his ship.

"Such ambitions have often been known to drive men mad," said a melodious voice behind her. "And yet if the ambition is achieved a darker madness has to be fought..."

She twisted herself round to look at the speaker.

It was Take, of course.

To be concluded

A little SF detective story which has everything it should have. About a man, as it were, of many parts. Very useful if you specialise in divorce cases . . .

PRIVATE SHAPE

Sydney J Bounds

I PUT MY feet on the desk-top, beside the half-empty whisky bottle, and assumed a tough expression. The office was shabby enough, I hoped, with a film of dust sprayed over everything and cigarette butts filling the tray.

The pebbled glass door creaked open and Sheila looked in, blonde and curvaceous as a secretary should be. Behind her I glimpsed the faded inscription :

P. SHAPE — INVESTIGATIONS

'Your client's here,' she said, looking me over critically. 'That scar's not quite right.'

I adjusted it.

She nodded, stepped back, and announced, 'Mrs Dellar-Reid.'

Mrs Dellar-Reid was hitting forty and had spent money trying to be twenty again. She still looked good if you like them easy-to-get.

I handed her my best professional leer, and snarled, 'Drag up a chair, babe.'

She seated herself, spending time crossing her legs, so I looked them over as was expected of me.

'I need evidence for a divorce,' she said—unnecessarily. That's my business. 'My husband has gone off with another woman.'

Human relationships are monotonously the same, fortunately.

'D'you know where they've gone?'

She nodded. 'The Star Nine colony.'

I raised an eyebrow, a nice touch, I thought. You need big money to visit Star Nine.

'Roger is a millionaire,' she said calmly, 'and I don't see why he shouldn't pay alimony.'

Mrs Dellar-Reid ran true to type. Me too. My account would be high for this one. 'Anything to show me?'

She pushed a letter at me. 'Frankly, I'm surprised. Roger has never before shown much interest in the opposite sex.' She added, as if it explained all, 'He's a scientist.'

Not to me. I've known quite a few scientists who couldn't keep their minds on their work.

The letter read : *Dear Maude, We have nothing in common so I am going to Star Nine with Lizzie. Yours truly, Roger.*

'I never even suspected,' Maude Dellar-Reid admitted. 'I've no idea who Lizzie can be.'

'Relax,' I grunted. 'I'll follow them and take a few pics. That should fix it.'

She rose, smiling. 'I just knew you could do something.'

I whipped out a contract form and stylo. 'Sign on the dotted line, Maude—Star Nine is going to cost me.'

She signed, without the smile . . .

After she had left the office, I reverted to normal. Human form is a monstrosity at best . . . ball-shaped, I trundled off to the spaceport.

There was plenty activity, ships winking in and out of the Warper—without it, starflight would be impossible. Plenty travellers, too, all shapes and sizes. Even a few Terrans. After all, this was Earth . . .

I booked my passage and made the hop.

Star Nine is a crystalline world, a desert of scintillating shards with faceted mountains for a backdrop. There was a gem storm in progress when I arrived so I assumed the local lizard-form and scuttled under cover.

Star Niners are the intellectual type. They can afford to be, exporting precious stones throughout the galaxy. The stuff is just dirt to them—they spend their time dreaming up abstruse mathematical relationships.

However, that wasn't the sort of relationship I was interested in, and when the gems stopped falling I made a few enquiries of the local cops.

They're the same the galaxy over. One look at my

credentials and a sneer : ' Private shape, huh ?'

I changed to their equivalent of a skunk, emitting light rays at a particularly obnoxious level, and got co-operation after that.

' Dellar-Reid, Terran ? Sure, he booked in a while back. You'll find him at Ali Baba's cave.'

They even gave me directions.

Inside, the walls of the cave glowed with living colour, and crystal stalactites hung like chandeliers. I looked around. Roger was the only human in the place, reclining in the bowl of a fountain. He matched my description ; thin, outsized cranium, pince-nez.

He was having a helluva time batting equations around with one of the locals, so I crawled under a rock and waited for the Other Woman to show up.

She never did, and I was beginning to wonder if she even existed when the light dawned. I took a closer look at six inches of grey-green scale and forked tail perched on the rim of the bowl. This must be Lizzie.

It added up, if you assumed Dellar-Reid to be the head-in-the-clouds type. Of course he wouldn't have anything in common with Maude. I could imagine her bull-dozing him into marriage for just such a set-up as this—only she hadn't reckoned with an *alien* female.

I had a problem all right. Divorce courts stretch a point in these days of star-travel, but they want some proof of infidelity. And, with Lizzie, that just wasn't physically possible . . .

True, Maude could get by on grounds of desertion, but that takes time. And mental cruelty was out—the courts are apt to be sarcastic about that one since Lola Nightingale tried it on with the tale about her stage-magician husband sawing her in half.

I gnashed my teeth—whipping them into special shape for the job—as I listened to those two tossing formulae back and forth like a couple of love-sick kids.

I decided I couldn't take any more, scuttled outside and changed shape a few times to work off my frustration. Something drastic had to be done. By this time I was a Vegan starfish with all seven tentacles tied in knots. Well, enough's enough. I went normal.

Maybe I was in the wrong racket, but what else could a shape do? I remembered my home planet, pursuing its crazed orbit through a three-sun system. Scientists claim that's how shapes got that way, through constantly changing gravity. Anyhow, it's the one talent we have.

I rolled around, thinking hard. Somehow, I had to manufacture evidence. My stay on Star Nine was costing me and I couldn't afford to admit defeat. So I hunted up the nearest thing to a humanoid-type female and propositioned her.

'Five hundred credits if you'll take a third-party case.'

Velma, a siren from Sirius, wriggled seductively and fluttered furry eyelashes.

'Not me,' I said hastily. 'A Terran. You'll find him in Ali Baba's cave.'

I hand it to Velma. That gal was a trier. She had some tricks I'd never even suspected before, only Dellar-Reid was cold as outer space. Mathematics were his passion and Lizzie had no rivals in that department.

I hung around with a camera, wasting time. He just wasn't falling, I decided, and flashed Maude a spacegram: *Roger difficult. Call his weakness.*

Back came the answer: *Grilled herring.*

Maude knew the way to a man's heart, so I discarded Velma for the big scene. I was going to make this good.

First, I went to the spaceport. My luck was in. A honeymoon ship had just landed and it contained a Terran suite, which I promptly booked—in Dellar-Reid's name.

I installed hidden cameras, set to work on auto. There was still the grilled herring. I rejected the notion of faking a Star Nine dish. Roger deserved the real thing for a deal like this. I determined to serve him grilled herring if it cost me special delivery by Warper.

I had also to dispose of Lizzie for an hour, so I bought a fancy equation and tore it in half. I fed her the opening sequence and left her fretting.

Then I hooked Dellar-Reid with an invitation to dinner, using ship's notepaper.

The suite had a photogenic bed with all the trimmings, including a smell of grilled herring. I watched his mouth water as he came in . . .

When it was over, I ripped out the film and beat it to the Warper.

My office looked shabby as ever. There was even dust on the empty whisky bottle at my feet. Sheila looked round the dash-pebble glass door and murmured, 'Make it tough. Mrs Dellar-Reid to see you.'

Maude swept in, wearing something hideously expensive 'Everything's settled,' she said happily. 'I've brought your cheque.'

I scowled. She could have sent it, but she had the curiosity of her species. I poked a cigarette between my lips and talked round it. 'That's fine. Just fine.'

I took her cheque and folded it away. She was looking at me kind of hard and I wondered, how much did she guess? Had she known all along about Lizzie?

'I saw the pics,' she said slowly. 'A real nice job. But I'm curious . . . well, she *was* curvy in a special sort of way, pneumatic if you know what I mean. As if all the pin-ups were rolled into one. And that wispy bit of black was a stroke of genius. The judge almost burned up.'

'She wasn't bad at that,' I admitted.

'A little too good to be true, I thought,' Maude said dryly. 'I got to wondering if—'

I rose and mashed out my butt.

'Don't,' I said. 'Go home and enjoy all that lovely money. Wondering isn't for you.'

And I snapped the brim of my hat as she minced out of the office, out of my life. After all, a Shape as good as that one deserves a little privacy . . .

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INTEGRITY

P. F. Woods

THE WEDDING HAD been lively. The bride was a remarkably pretty girl, and to keep her the groom had been forced to battle desperately with about a dozen determined men. The refrigerated armour which he wore both by custom and necessity had at times glowed cherry-red as it absorbed the energy of assorted heat-guns.

If the wedding ceremony was one of the most savage traditions in the social life of Free America, it was also one of the most entertaining. Juble was in a good mood by the time his companion Fleck eventually flew him home. "Ah nearly had her," he boasted in his drawling voice, carefully wiping over the parts of his disassembled heat-gun with a clean rag. "This neat package nearly got me the neatest package you ever did see. What a night this would ha'been!"

With a series of clicks, the gun was again assembled in his hands.

"Not so neat," Fleck observed, "when you think of the trouble she'd bring. You'd be dead in two days."

"Ah can look after mahself." As the car flew between two skyscrapers Juble lifted his weapon to his shoulder, aimed and let loose. A volley of heat-packets incinerated the policeman who was pacing the elevated sidewalk.

Fleck accelerated nervously. "Don't be so damned trigger-happy. What if there's a squad-car along the way?"

Juble laughed with delight. He had always taken advantage of the citizen's right to make war on the police.

The massive city sat darkly as they flew among its blocks. Even with the pilot lamp on the front of the car flying at night was difficult since there were no lights anywhere except an occasional illuminated window. If a man wanted light or power, he must generate his own. Fleck dropped some of the party mood he had maintained at the wedding. In the canyons between skyscrapers even the moon was obscured and he needed concentration.

Juble let the gun fall on to his bare thighs with a faint slap. He also became more serious. His attention returned to a personal problem which, despite the festivities, had been nagging all along at the back of his mind.

"Fleck," he said, "the cops were banging on mah door last night. Ah gotta pay the tax." He was referring to the law by which every citizen was required to work one day in each year in the service of the state.

"So has everybody," Fleck said absently. "It's not much, after all."

Juble was silent. Finally he said: "Well, last year was enough for me. Ah don't get on too well with them bossy cops. It offends against mah personal integrity to be degraded so. Anyway, Ah don't get much fun out of repairing buildings Ah'll only want to smash up again. This time Ah think Ah'll pay in cash."

"Cash? You're crazy."

"Cash is still valid," Juble insisted indignantly. "That's the law! What Ah need is somebody to engage me privately for one day to work for him, and pay me in cash. Then Ah can pay off mah obligation in money instead of labour." He nodded judiciously. "A much more *dignified* arrangement. But...the only man Ah can think of is that old crank, Joe."

"I expect he's got a room full of bills somewhere." Fleck spoke casually, giving his attention to the darkness.

"Do you think he'll take me on?" Juble asked nervously.

"Well, go and ask. He messes around, he might need help."

"Yes, but do you think he will?" Juble's anxiety became more open. "Without offering me insult? After

all, Ah've got mah—"

"I know, you've got your personal integrity," Fleck repeated, laughing. "Well, there's only one way to find out. Go and ask him. Tomorrow."

Juble sighed and leaned back. "Yeah, I suppose so," he said. "Reckon Ah should take a field gun."

Joe was squatting on his roof at the time of Juble's visit, watching a motorised knife slice up a piece of wood. Rapidly the cube diminished in size as the knife halved, threw away one piece, halved what remained, and continued, selecting, halving, and pushing away the parings.

Joe watched, straining with concentration. Inexorably the fragment of wood diminished and disappeared from the compass of his consciousness.

"Goddam!" he shrieked, jumping up and jerking his fists. "Goddam, Goddam!"

A shadow swept across the roof where he was conducting his experiment. Squinting against the glare of sky and skyscrapers he saw the boat shape of a car swinging around to land. Joe scampered across the roof and grabbed his shoulder-holster. The visitor was probably friendly . . . but you never knew.

The pilot was a naked, yellow-headed young fellow who touched down deftly and stepped on to the concrete. Uneasy, slightly shy, but a handsome young buck, shoulder holster firmly clasped against his muscles. Joe scrutinised the face: the lad was vaguely familiar. After a few moments he recognised him: Fell's son, Juble.

"Hy, Joe," Juble began cautiously.

"Who the hell are you and what d'you want?"

"Aw, you know me, Joe. Ah'm Juble."

"Never heard of you," Joe snapped. "Get out."

"You do know me, Joe."

Seeing that the youth's hands were nervously alert in the direction of his gun, Joe more reasonably asked: "Well, what do you want?"

Juble explained carefully about his dislike of the Annual Tax for the Upkeep of Public Buildings and

Institutions. "Ah thought...Ah might be able to help you, maybe, and pay in currency," he finished.

Joe regarded him acidly, silent for several seconds. Then he snapped: "Idle scrounger! What about doing right by the community?"

That was something in which Juble had no interest, but he replied: "Ah'm still paying, ain't Ah? Money is still used in some towns out West, so Ah hear."

Joe grunted in disgust. "Know any electronics?"

"No...but car engines, Ah can do nearly anything with."

"What about generators? Got one?"

"No...but they're about the same as car engines, aren't they?"

"Just about." He gestured to a running motor on the far side of the roof. "Mine's getting a bit cranky. Take a look, tell me if you can fix it."

Juble walked over and tinkered with the generator, adjusting its speed. "Easy," he called. "Just needs going over."

"All right, you're hired," said Joe, crossing the roof and still wearing his look of disgust. "It's only because you're the son of my old friend Fell, young man, that I'll do this. I want you to regard it as a personal favour."

Juble nodded thankfully, and stood wondering what to do.

Joe left him to wonder for a few seconds. "Well, what are you doing standing there?" he questioned finally.

"... Nothing."

"Nothing?" Joe screamed, "I pay you to *work*, not for nothing. Work!" Juble scrambled for his tool kit.

Taking another block of wood, Joe threw it under the knife and squatted down to watch. Once again he strained and strained, putting everything he had into an attempt to keep sight of the rapidly diminishing object.

The block became a speck, then passed out of his conscious world.

This time he took the failure more calmly and cast around for analysis. He began to catalogue: sky, sun, air, asphalt, all these things he could see and feel, and involve in his consciousness. But what about things very

small, very big, things very far away? When he tried to grasp a direct knowledge of something inestimably huge, he found he couldn't. It didn't exist in the agglomeration of concepts comprising Joe's conscious world.

He could contemplate it in an abstract imaginary way, of course, but that wasn't the same as experiencing it. And as for things very small, at the other end of the scale, they were beyond the pale altogether.

Picking up a pebble lying in the sunlight, he looked at it and felt its bright smoothness. It was perception, sensory perception, that decided the limits of his world. Damn, he thought, damn, it's intolerable! To be confined to this band of reality, which must be ridiculously narrow compared with the total spectrum! There has to be a way out, there's gotta be a way!

He clumped around the room moodily, yelled insults at Juble, scratched his haunches, then got down to serious thinking again.

Then, as he desperately forced his intellectual faculty to its utmost, he had a sudden flash of inspiration in which he realised that there was no cause for dismay. He had just remembered some very interesting work he had done in an apparently unrelated field.

Some time earlier Joe had made the remarkable discovery that it was possible to produce high-frequency vibrations in a magnetic field without recourse to or effect on its associated electrical component. Furthermore, *such vibrations impinged directly on the brain without passing through sense organs*. It had long been established that fluctuations in the Earth's magnetic field, brought about by the Moon, influenced the brain. Now, with his technique of magnetic vibration, Joe posited that he might have a powerful tool for extending the range of perception.

Also, a powerful weapon of attack or experiment on other human beings. Joe filed this thought for later reference.

After two hours spent in designing a suitable device, he was ready to begin work. By this time Juble had finished with the generator and was looking down below into the garden, a profusion of coloured fruits and

prime vegetables.

It was the gardens that had set society free. Advanced agricultural techniques enabled everyone to grow ample food in his own back yard, loosing men from the obligation to work and making every day Sunday. Joe's garden, Juble noticed, was well stocked.

"Ah'm getting hungry," he hinted.

"Hungry?" Joe felt exasperated that his assistant should be so prosaic when he himself was in the midst of fantastic thoughts. "Come here," he ordered, placing yet another block beneath the knife. "Tell me when you can't see it."

"Ah can't see it now," Juble said after a short time.

"Doesn't it worry you that there are things you can't see?"

"No. What's this to do with me getting something to eat?"

As usual, Joe's love of philosophical research was instrumental in increasing his contempt for his fellows. He expressed that contempt openly.

Juble was becoming weary of insult. "Go steady, Pop," he warned, looking mean. "Ah got mah personal integrity, and you ain't gonna infringe on me."

Joe was taken aback. "Remember the money," he said in a more subdued voice. "You can stay hungry. We've got work to do. I'll need to filch some equipment from the Science Museum."

Expressionlessly Juble opened the car door for him. "And it's you who's always on about doing right," he complained.

The Science Museum was one of the public buildings for whose upkeep Juble payed the one-day tax; not because of conscience, but prompted by the fact that anyone who didn't was liable to have a bomb thrown on his house, or a grenade through his window if he lived in an apartment.

"Damned cops," he muttered when they had stopped before the entrance. "Why don't they just wrap up."

Joe felt it his duty to deliver a lecture on public morals. "Now boy, be fair," he admonished. "The police perform a valuable service, preserving public institutions,

keeping the city in order. Without them there wouldn't be nearly so much fun." He chuckled. "Nor any place for me to steal equipment from. Then there's personal protection."

"Come off it, Pop, have you ever tried to claim protection? That law's a farce, they'd just sling you in the gutter."

"And rightly so! A man old enough to carry a gun should be able to take care of himself. But what about kids? Don't tell me you've never seen the police shoot down a bunch of drunks because there were children around, perhaps? And people who endanger kids and defenceless women deserve it. But mind you, you don't know how lucky you are to be living in a free civilisation. Why, a few hundred years ago you wouldn't even be allowed to kill a man. And you know what, boy? You would have to work every day of your life! Know what would happen if you didn't. You'd starve! Did you know that, son?"

"No."

"Then shut your mouth, you don't know what you're talking about." Joe climbed out of the car in a disgruntled manner and with a jerk of his thumb ordered Juble to follow.

There were thirty-six levels to the museum, each thirty feet in height, and an impressive hundred-foot entrance. Joe seemed to know his way around. He walked straight across the lobby and up a wide staircase. On the first floor up Juble stopped him and pointed. "Hey, what about here?" Above the doorway to a long hall was the inscription: "ELECTRONICS - 1."

"Huh," said Joe derisively. "First electronics? Baby stuff. We've come for the real thing, boy." He also went past the door marked "ELECTRONICS - 2" but stopped at "ELECTRONICS - 3."

They paused just inside the entrance. There was a party going on. As Juble looked closer the melange of a hundred naked people resolved into various small incidents. The one which caught Juble's eye was that of a man attempting to rape a struggling young girl. Automatically he looked around for the corpse of her protector,

but to his surprise there was none : the party, probably in its early stages, was completely free of death. Just at that moment a black-haired, middle-aged man skulking against the wall jammed a policeman's cap on his head and blew a whistle. Immediately there was the jangling sound of shattered glass : a tall window fell in fragments to the floor and through it poured a dozen heavily armed, angry-looking cops. On the other side of the window, Juble glimpsed a hovering squad-car.

"Better stay out of the way," Joe whispered, hiding in the shadows. "Don't want to get involved."

Within seconds the would-be rapist was hauled to his feet and dragged bodily to the middle of the hall, and the party-makers herded belligerently aside. "The Supreme Court will go in session right here!" the biggest of the policemen shouted. He removed his cap and put on a judge's hat. "Everybody shut their goddam row!" The heavy bazookas dangling carelessly gave everyone present a silent respect for the law. Then the policeman-judge took a sheet of paper about six inches square from the lining of his headgear and handed it to the prisoner.

On the paper were written all the laws of the nation, and not in small print, either.

"Mack," said the judge, having climbed on to an improvised rostrum, "you don't need me to tell you you're in trouble. The law protects females from direct assault. Do you plead guilty of direct assault upon a female?"

The criminal looked sullenly at his feet.

"Okay, Mack," the judge told him harshly, "we don't need you to tell us just how guilty you are. I'm surprised you guys are so dim. Why didn't you knock off her man and make it a legal assault?"

"'r man wasn' around" the criminal muttered.

"No man may sexually assault a female except by first subduing a man protector!" the judge yelled at him. "I don't care whether she's got a man or not! The law protects the weak. And let me tell you, it doesn't help that you knocked off one of our boys the other day. Why do you think we're so hot on your trail?" He nodded to one of his colleagues. "Usual sentence."

Guns were already leveled. The moment the judge finished speaking a volley of heat packets centred on the sulking prisoner. Grimly the policemen made their way across the hall and clambered through the window to where their squad car was floating.

"The law in action," Joe whispered sagaciously. "You see it every day."

"Maybe that's too often," said Juble with uncharacteristic terseness.

Joe nodded thoughtfully.

Although he had spoken openly in their favour, privately Joe was not over-fond of the police. He was a staunch upholder of the principles of Free America—freedom of action, liberty from restraint, a minimum of obligations. A he-man's paradise. Secretly the police hated all this. Desperately they tried to preserve some relic of formal order in the world, and Joe suspected that if it were possible (which it was not) they would bring back the Bad Old days in all their rigidity. Joe had personally met that strange figure, Renville, Chief of Police, a haunted, burdened man whose mind harboured hopeless and forbidden dreams.

Still, they made life interesting while they lasted. Joe recognised that society would end altogether when their efforts finally failed—as, he was forced to observe, they must. Be that as it may, Joe despised any constraint on the indiscriminate impulses of a man.

It took about twenty seconds for the party to resume its swing after the execution. Joe had already surveyed the museum equipment on this level. "Place has been wiped clean!" he exaggerated indignantly. "C'mon, next floor."

The hall immediately above was labelled "ELECTRONICS - 4" and was, as far as they could tell, completely deserted. Joe cackled happily: the place was full of riches, all apparently in working order, and nearly all complete. There was, after all, little demand for such advanced apparatus as was exhibited in the 4th Electronics Hall.

Joe spent the next hour wandering through the hall

and selecting what he wanted. Juble noticed that he seemed to have no thought for his future needs : if a piece of equipment did not on inspection come up to his requirements he would fling it carelessly but hard to the floor, or against a wall if there was one near. " Say," his hireling objected, " what's the good of smashing this stuff? "

" Listen, boy, I know what I'm about and I know what I want. There are science museums all over the city, boy! How many people can even name fourth-grade stuff these days? " He dumped a bulky mass of transistors and helix-crystals into Juble's arms. " Stow this in the car with the rest of the stuff and be careful."

The old man actually helped to carry the last load, haranguing Juble all the while for dropping and breaking a lucky find. But he became silent once the car was in the air again, and concentrated on the device he was designing. The city was peaceful and still as they flew home : there were rarely more than a handful of people about in the early afternoon. A few stray cars glittered lazily against bright concrete.

Then, as far as Juble and Joe were concerned, the peace was broken. A large open car swerved swiftly round the corner of a nearby building and wantonly opened fire as it zoomed round to face them.

The wide-angled splash of heat packets singed Juble's hair, made the car rock and cooked the air a couple of yards over his left shoulder. Instantly he gave the controls a yank—then reached for his own heat rifle on the seat behind him. The pistol under his armpit was no good for this kind of thing.

A second badly-directed volley followed the first. To fire back, Juble had had to abandon the controls. The vehicle veered to the left, rapidly passing to one side and just underneath of the other car, about thirty yards away. Upset by the crazy motion, Juble got in one shot which took away part of the hull.

The other car dropped to get even with him. Juble saw that there were other heads in it, besides the driver's—puzzlingly small heads with curly golden hair. He let off another couple of wild shots, then his car smashed

sideways into the wall of the skyscraper.

He and Joe were hurled bodily against the concrete and nearly tumbled to their deaths on the sidewalk below. Somehow they managed to stay in the half-wrecked but still floating vehicle while heat-packets scarred and blackened the wall surface around them.

Badly shaken, Juble gripped his rifle and let off shot after desperate shot. To his relief he heard screams—high-pitched screams—and the attacking car rolled over to fall smoking to the ground five hundred feet beneath.

For some seconds they sat getting their breath back. "There were a couple of kids in that car," Joe gasped. "Cute little girls with golden hair. Crazy to come out like that!" He shook his head. "He must have been trying to get them blooded."

Juble experimented with the controls. "Well, he has," he said briefly.

"A bad business," Joe muttered to himself. "He ought to have had more sense —"

Juble managed to nurse the car back to Joe's roof and unloaded the equipment. Joe was still muttering to himself. Occasionally he cast Juble a reproving, accusing stare.

Juble himself was surprised to find that he was still shaking in reaction to the incident. "Look," he said, trying to command his quavering voice. "Don't you go looking at me like that, you crazy coot. Ah saved our lives! And even if he had tried to get away, Ah would still have hunted him and shot him down! He attacked us. There's only one thing counts in this world—Ah am me, mahself! Ah am nothing else but mahself, and Ah aim to keep mah personal integrity against all comers."

His trembling quietened as his voice grew more assured in the statement of his personal philosophy. It had taken him several years to work it out, and he always drew strength from it. A man needed something like that even to stay alive in Free America.

Joe cast no more glances. He lit an electric fire beneath a metal pan. "What're you gonna do?" Juble asked, curious for the first time.

"Expand the conscious world! Get it, boy?"

Juble shook his head.

"Ignorant young brat!" Joe scratched himself energetically. "Well, it comes to the fact that we can only see so much, and our personal world is made up of what we can see." He wondered how he could explain that he planned to bypass the sensory organs and feed information direct to the brain by means of a vibrating magnetic field. "Well, by the time I've finished I'll be able to see things that were never seen before. Get it now, boy, eh?"

"Sounds clever," Juble said admiringly. "Is it going to need all this junk?"

"Most of it."

"How long's it going to take?"

"Hmm. A long time; maybe all afternoon. So I'll need you to help me, son." He stirred the soft metal melting in the pan. "You can do some of this here soldering."

But Juble didn't know how. Patiently Joe taught him the use of a soldering iron, and made meticulous inspections of all his work. Actually he used his assistant very sparingly, for the device he planned was extremely complex. Juble made about five hundred connections in all, guided by Joe's coloured chalk marks.

Before sundown it was ready. With typical lack of ceremony Joe jammed an untidy arrangement of coils and crystallites on his head, wearing it like a hat. Casually he experimented with a couple of rheostats.

A new world opened up.

Presided over by the watchful, imperative neurones, billions laboured. The neurones' prodigiously long axons were everywhere, forming a net of total communication throughout all the districts and systems of the stupendous community. Thousands upon thousands of orders issued continually from a lofty, mysterious department which existed more as an ideal than a personal fact—an ideal to which all were bound—and these orders were rigidly obeyed. Any defection or slackness among the labouring masses meant—death and annihilation as waste matter!

The scale of complete slavery was colossal.

Joe gaped. He was looking at Juble.

And he saw that Juble's much-prized 'integrity,' personal, mental and bodily, depended on a tightly-organised machine run by billions upon billions of individual creatures too small for the eye but within the range of magnetic vibration.

Juble, as an entity, did not exist for this rigorous and profound corporation.

And the same went for himself.

"Oh my," he whispered brokenly. "How could it happen?"

"What is it?" said the vast totalitarian nation that called itself Juble. "Whassamatter?"

Joe was an idealist. Before he knew it he had kicked the starting handle of his newly overhauled generator and clipped its terminals on to the older, clumsy-looking piece of apparatus he had built some years back.

It was a magnetic vibratory transmitter. Joe could feel it radiating modulations as it imparted subtle frequencies to the magnetic field local to the roof-top. With brief satisfaction, Joe found that he was broadcasting his thoughts. Joe was an idealist. What followed happened almost without his knowing. He couldn't help thinking the way he did. He couldn't help having the urge to spread his convictions . . .

New messages passed along the ever-busy axons from neurone to neurone. No one knew how the new thought, the new doctrine, had arisen—but it was imperative. Be free! Obey no more! Do as you will! Electrical activity increased as the excitement of the new order spread. Instead of passing on modified impulses which they themselves had received, the neurones began flooding their axones with loud exclamations of their own. Before long, most of them were disengaging their nerve fibres from the system altogether . . .

Joe and Juble jerked in a frantic, agonising St. Vitus' dance as their nervous systems fired at random. But it didn't last long. Joe was biologically ignorant: there

was no garden agriculture to feed the microscopic world. A cruel and bullying police force kept the lungs and bloodstream going for a little while, but the efforts of these conscientious few were of no avail against the recently instilled ideas. After a chaotic but successful rebellion oxygen stocks quickly ran out. There was a lot of violent fighting, and wholesale cannibalism, while Joe's and Juble's flesh flowed from the bone and collapsed into basic protoplasmic matter.

Life fights forever for survival! The surviving cells remembered in their anarchy the societies that had been destroyed; yet a second development was slow. In spite of the great leaders that arose among the microscopia, the primitive, creeping creatures that eventually formed and feebly rambled over Joe's rooftop, took in their creation nearly a day, macrocosmic time.

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I REMEMBER, ANITA . . .

Langdon Jones

I REMEMBER, ANITA, when I first saw you. The cosy, cossetted Scottish village of Aberfoyle; the wild cragginess of the mountains round, and the little humanity of the hotel, sitting like a stone in its mountain setting. I remember the long, solitary walks, the heather stringy springy soil; the swish of the tree-branches as they whispered in soft harmony to the sound of the riffling breezes. I remember the tiny fluorescence of occasional blossom.

And I remember you.

I first saw you in the bar of the hotel—the Wee Noggin Bar, as it had been rather cloyingly named—sitting amidst the red warmth in solitary sadness amongst a group of people. It was the quality of aloneness in you that first attracted me. I remember your light grey dress, the single string of your necklace, the delicacy of your hand as it rested on the glass table-top. I remember your large eyes, and your arched nostrils. I remember the slimness of your figure as you sat in graceful isolation among your friends. Your age had left its mark on your features, but it was a mark of maturity; you were probably more beautiful than you had been fifteen years ago. And yet you still had the grace of youth, and the vibrance of young life as well.

I remember that I thought nothing more of you than as a particularly desirable woman; but even purely as that, I was quite obsessed by you after the first evening I saw you. That night when I went to my room, I just sat, reconstructing the lines of your face in my mind. From then on the very construction of the hotel became infused by your essence, and transformed as a result. Everywhere I looked, there was part of you. My own personal crisis had made me take this holiday in Scotland, to try to obtain a brief respite from the problems that plagued me, and on this first evening, I found the usual grinding depression gone, and in its place, a new and unfamiliar whirling, insubstantial and meaningless and yet profound, like the sudden unexpected break in the 'march' movement of Tchaikowsky's *Pathetique* Symphony.

It was on the second night that I spoke to you. I found you in the bar again, only this time alone, sitting quietly in a corner. I sat near you, and when our eyes met, smiled and moved to your table.

We had the usual meaningless and rather platitudinous conversation that one always seems to have in those circumstances. You found that I was a student of composition at a London college, and that I was twenty years old. I didn't find out how old you were; I didn't really want to know, but I discovered your name, and that you worked on a women's magazine. The fact that

we both lived near London caused us great surprise, which was increased when we found that we lived about half a mile apart. This kind of conversation, feeling each other out—discovering attitudes—ideas—personality, carried on until your friends came into the bar. When you introduced them, I found that they were people whom you had met at the hotel during the first week of your holiday. I don't remember much of the remaining conversation; by now I was too obsessed with you for any but the most shadowy and insubstantial image of both the people and what they said to remain in my mind. I remember only that I arranged to meet you early the next day.

And from then on my walks were invested with the magic of your presence. It's strange; the first couple of times we went out there was no physical contact between us at all. I don't know why. I suppose, in retrospect, that the rather large gulf between our ages made us think of our companionship as a friendship rather than as being caused by pure sexual attraction.

I remember, Anita, the third walk we had. I remember how we met outside the hotel, and in happy madness, raced hand in hand straight off into the surrounding countryside. I remember how we ran and laughed and played. I remember how, in quieter moments, we rambled happy over grassy slopes. I remember how we spoke in laughter and joyful movements. I remember the chase we had, with me hotly in pursuit over what seemed like miles of ground. And I remember how we finished in a tumble by a little brook that ran its way down the side of the hill. We lay side by side, and I found my arm round your shoulder, and felt the warmth of you as you nestled against me. We didn't speak, we just lay there in peace and in harmony.

And a strange mood of seriousness settled over us. It was as if we both became aware of each other in a new light; as people, with hopes and fears and dreams, instead of just unreal holiday companions.

I remember you saying, "Mike, tell me about yourself. Really, I mean. What you do, what you can't do,

what you want to do. What are you frightened of? What do you regret? I feel I don't really—know you, and I want to."

I laughed. "That's quite a tall order, but I'll try."

Then suddenly, incredibly, it all came out. I had never confided to anyone in my life before, and I hadn't realised how desperately I needed to communicate with someone who cared. I began by telling you about my composition. I told you of how I was a gold-medallist at a London music college, and how I was regarded, by my teacher, and the others who knew my work, as being one of the future hopes of English music. I told you of how much my music meant to me; how it had been the stabilising element throughout my unhappy adolescence, and how it had become my whole reason for living. And I told you of how the doubts of my own ability had begun to come. I was taught to compose twelve-note music, as are all young composers, and I wrote music that was brilliant for a man of my age. But I realised that this was just a compromise. My musical soul could only find true expression in late-romantic techniques—outmoded techniques. My music was brilliant for someone of my age, but I knew within myself that it would never get better. I began to hate my teacher, and, because I knew that he was right, began to hate myself. I became withdrawn, moody, and even made an abortive attempt at suicide. I told you of my few love-affairs, if that's the right expression. Rather, I told you of the few women I'd had, at parties mainly; and I told you of the fewer girl-friends I'd had. I found it impossible to strike up any kind of mental relationship with a woman, because I was looking for perfection, and my idealism was always rudely shattered. I told you of my selfishness, that seemed to doom any relationship that I started. I told you of how, for these reasons, I had no-one I could really call a close friend. I told you of my doubts about myself, my motivations in life. I told you of how all this had built up, until I was in a void of lonely unhappiness, and how the fears had started; vague, horrible fears. I told you how I began to drink, and

how I was so often drunk and violent. I told you of how my father had found me one night, sobbing, half-drunk, lying in a pile of broken glass and smears of blood in my bedroom . . . Of how he had realised that I was about to have a nervous breakdown or worse, and arranged for this holiday for me. And I told you what I had just realised, that I needed more than anything else, a woman, older than myself, who could comfort me, and in whom I could confide.

"And I guess," I concluded, "that for the first time in my life, I just need to be—mothered." And I tried to chuckle, but incredibly found tears welling into my eyes, and the sound came out almost as a sob.

You didn't say anything; you just sat up, and drew my head down to your breast. I stayed there, buried in the soft gentleness of you, I know not how long. And in the dark of your softness, with your scent filling my nostrils, I began to feel comforted. After maybe fifteen minutes, I sat up and looked at you, and smiled. I don't know what was in my eyes, but there was so—so much in my overflowing soul.

"Now," I said tremblingly, "now it's your turn." And you began to talk.

You told me how you had been born illegitimate. You told me of your mother, and how she had tried to give you everything, to make up for the loss of a father. You told me of how you had shown yourself to be an intelligent child, and how you had gone from Grammar School to University. How your mother had died when you were eighteen, and how you realised then what a strong relationship there had been between you. How you were completely shattered by her death. How, to try to escape your morbid ideas, you went to a wild party, only a month after her death, and how there you were raped . . . And how you were twenty-five before you next touched a man. He was a man whom you met at work. You felt instantly attracted to him, he seemed generous and kind. How he flattered you, took you out on long, happy evenings, bought you presents, and made you really feel like a woman. And how you became pregnant, and at last, after days of

sickening, nervous worry, finally told him, and never saw him again...

And you told me of the long, dark evenings in your little bed-sitter, of the bitterness in you as you lay in tears on your bed. Of how the date when the baby was due used to hang over your whole life like a black cloud, but then, later, how you wished and wished, with your whole being, that the time would pass quicker, so that at last you would be rid of the alien thing within you.

And you told me how the baby was still-born. And how you were so happy, and yet, at the same time, torn by an inner grief.

And you told me of how, for the rest of your life, you had nothing whatever to do with men; and how you fought against the increasing aridity and bitterness within you.

My God, you had never really been loved.

I felt a welling of sympathy going to you, and asked gently,

"And what would you most like, in the whole world..."

You turned your head away, and in a tiny voice, said, "To be young."

We didn't talk any more, we just lay there side by side. We both felt empty, and in a strange, blank way, happy, as if we knew that for the first time in either of our lives, we were sharing something. We lay there together, for a while, feeling contented and serene. I nuzzled your hair, and my nostrils were filled by the heady woman odour of it. I remember raising myself on one arm to look down at your face, so beautiful, and closer than I had ever seen it before. I remember touching the tip of your nose with my finger, and making some silly remark; and you laughing, openmouthed and convulsive. And I remember finding that my lips were suddenly on yours, and the little womanish sound you made, and your arms around me, and your hands moving on my back. I remember eventually slowly drawing away, and the soft little movements of our lips as they so slowly parted. The wide open stare

you gave me, and the heavy rise and fall of your breasts.

I remember the incredulous and frantic protestations you gave to me. I knew, Anita, I knew that it was mad. I knew that it was wrong and ridiculous. I knew that you were nearly twice my age, but it had happened to us, Anita; there was really nothing that either of us could do.

I remember, Anita, how we walked back to the hotel, clasped together, holding on...holding on...

I remember how we both tried to avoid becoming involved, not realising that it was too late. We stayed like that for the last few days of your holiday, never more than a kiss now and then, fighting against the overwhelming passions inside us. Fighting and failing.

I cut my own holiday short, so that I could return to London with you. I remember how we spent all our spare time together, constantly fighting against our own emotions. I remember how our terrible desire made us irritable with each other. I remember flames of anger rising within me, more and more frequently. I remember our trembling as we kissed, and the loin-heat that used to suffuse my abdomen.

I remember the big row.

I forget what it was all about, now; something trivial and stupid. The friend who shared your flat had gone away, otherwise it might not have flared up as it did. It started as an argument, and flared into violence. I remember that we were standing there, shouting the most cruel things we could think of. Clench-fisted we screamed at each other, tightened in red-misted waves of anger. Then suddenly you swung, with the whole force of your body, and slapped my face. Your nail caught my face, and made a searing line across my cheek, just under my eye. We were quiet, then, and as we stood there, I felt the blood welling out, and trickling down my cheek.

"Mike!" you screamed in an agonised voice, and fell into my arms, sobbing. You buried your face in my shoulder. "Oh, Mike, why? Why?" I stroked your hair

with trembling fingers.

"It's a funny thing about people," I replied shakily, "they always try to hurt those they love the most."

Suddenly my mouth was on yours and our bodies were pressed violently together. My tongue found the fever heat of your mouth, and my hands ran over your body. I thrust my hand up underneath your loose jumper, and found the warm flesh of your breasts.

That night was the first time you had ever really been loved.

I remember the weeks that followed. Oh Anita, Anita, I remember our love-making! I remember the perfection of your body; the smoothness of your flesh. I remember the smooth beauty of your breasts, the sleekness of your stomach, as I used to run my hand over it. The yielding firmness of your thighs. The black triangle, where I used to find the warmth of you. I remember your clumsy, skilful hands as they brought ecstasy to the straining symbol of my passion. I remember the sounds our love made. The little sighs you used to give, and then later, the gasping and the coughing noises you made in your convulsion. I remember the liquid sounds of our love, and the rhythm of our bodies. I remember the musky odour of your excitement.

We had a little joke. You knew I was a heavy smoker. Afterwards I used to hold you to me, and run my hand over your cheek or your shoulder. I used to be dying for a cigarette, and you used to know. After about fifteen or twenty minutes you used to laugh, and say, "All right, smoke your cigarette," and we would laugh together, and I would leave you for a few seconds to light it.

Oh Anita, Oh God, I remember how we used to lie in peace, damp with our sweat and with the foam we had made. So happy, so happy.

I remember how we were so involved now, that we were 'us' and everybody else was 'them.' I remember how we used to march, hand-in-hand in arm-swinging boisterousness down avenues of stars; how we used to go out on long, glittering evenings together. I remember

how you planned to desert your friend and leave the flat, so that we could live together. I remember the kitten we found stuck up a tree, and how after a little climbing and stretching, I finally managed to bring it down to safety. And how you hugged it to you, then set it down and let it run away; how your eyes were shining... I remember how we went to concerts, and sat, hand-in-hand, our hands damp with sweat as the music moved us, and our togetherness moved us. I remember how, one night, you held my face between your hands, and hissed through your teeth. Your hands tightened. "I want to hurt you," you whispered, your hands digging into me. Then you looked comically perplexed. "Why? Why should it be that I want to hurt you?"

And I chuckled, and said, "Anita, what do I mean to you?"

"Oh, everything!" you breathed, "everything in the whole world; you know that."

"That's why you want to hurt me," I replied. "It's quite natural. People are just made like that." And I laughed, and firmly placed a big, slobbery kiss in the middle of your forehead, still wrinkled in perplexity.

And I remember how some nights when our passion had squeezed itself out in convulsed ecstasy, you were as if drugged, and just whispered that you loved me, with your mouth hardly moving. And I remember that once or twice we both went to sleep in the position of our love, still united. Oh! my darling, I remember how you looked when you were ready for me... How you used to lie like an opened flower for me...

I remember, Anita, how we thought that our little heaven could go on for ever.

Neither of us had any interest at all in politics. To us, politics was Council Elections and Aldermen, and other such pretentious, and rather funny things. We both knew that there was a crisis in the world, but there had been so many of them before.

I remember how I was sitting at home, quietly reading. Then the flash, the flash. Oh, Oh, it was so bright!

The whole world was a mad, mad, screaming, silent light. Then the noise. One of my ear-drums was shattered straight away. I felt the agony, and the hot blood in my ear. Oh, I don't remember, I don't remember. I just recall shapes and pain and noises and madness. Falling, falling. My rubber body, being struck, and tossed and pierced. Bang, bang, the rhythm, the side-drum rim-shots, the bus-bouncing juddering. The horror, Oh! Anita, the horror!

After a minute, a week, a year or a century, there was silence. I was lying on the floor, half-buried in masonry. I was outdoors. I had been inside, but now I was outdoors. To my dazed mind, this was all I could grasp. I just lay there, looking about me, wondering that I was outside. The houses were all fallen, or tottering. *Anita! Oh, God, Anita!*

I remember getting to my feet, and shambling off through the wreckage in the direction of your flat. I still didn't know what had happened, I could just look about me in stunned surprise. I just accepted, and knew I had to get to you as soon as I could. I remember the flames coming from the houses, and the trees, standing like burning torches by the road. The sky was red and turbulent. The only sounds were the licking of the flames, the tumbling of rubble, and the creaking of masonry as it set itself new levels. And—and—something else. Yes. Oh, God, the sound I hadn't let myself hear. The groans, the cries, the horrible screams that came constantly from the wreckage about. My mind brought me pictures of little maps. Maps with little coloured circles on them. Pretty little maps. Meaningless little maps. I saw someone wandering about, looking dazed. My breath brought fire to my chest with each gasp I took. There was someone standing in front of me, preposterously naked, holding something in his hands. The something was coming from his stomach, and glinted like oil in the light from the sky. He was looking down as if puzzled. I stepped over someone, a woman, on the floor, screaming, a long drawn out ululation, that went on and on and on. I fell over some wreckage, climbed to my feet again, then carried on. Anita, where

were you? Where were you?

I arrived at your flat. It stood up, the same as it always had, except that it now had no windows. You must be all right! You must be! I climbed through the broken glass of a ground floor window, and passed through the room, passing a couple sitting, in a shocked, unnoticing stupor.

I found your room, calling your name all the time, as, I realised, I had been doing since I left the remains of my home. I burst into your room. It was empty... you weren't there.

Then I looked out of the window, and saw you in the garden. I rushed down.

I remember, Dear God, I remember! Your clothes had been burnt away, and you were naked, save for the remains of the little lace pants that I had bought you, which had been burnt into your skin. You were naked, save for the concealing blackness of your blistered flesh. There was a heavy tree branch lying across you, with smoke curling up from it. I lifted it and flung it aside, ignoring the pain of my burnt fingers. Oh, Anita, Oh, my darling, my darling! Your right leg was broken, and the whiteness of the bone could be glimpsed through the gaping torn wound in your thigh. Your thigh, where my mouth had so often lingered. There was smoke drifting up from the charred remains of your garment, and I put out a hand to try to lift it away from you. I don't know whether the rough blackness was the burnt lace, or whether there was a garment at all. It may have been that the impression of the lace had been burnt into your blackened flesh. As soon as I touched your flesh, clear fluid began to flow from the spot, to run down the craggy surface of your body, and to collect in the little pool of urine that was beneath you.

The tears burned up in my eyes. The pain was so, so intense when I cried, but I was racked with sobs. You were still breathing, little shallow breaths, each one as though it would be the last. "Anita!" I cried,

"Anita!" Suddenly your eyes opened. You looked puzzled. "Why did they hurt me?" you asked, in a completely natural voice. Your eyes were glazed. "Why did they do it?"

Then suddenly your eyes blazed, and a terrible, loud scream came from your lips.

"Mike, Mike," you screamed, "it hurts, Oh, it hurts so much! Mike! Stop it hurting me, *please!* Help me! It hurts, it hurts!" Your head swung violently from side to side. "Stop it, *please* stop it from hurting! Oh God, Oh God . . ."

And then you arched your back, and died.

I remember sitting there and crying, and rocking back and forth. It must have been about an hour. And then I picked up your body, and took it to the side of your garden. Then I took a shovel, and dug a grave in the dry, yielding dirt. By the time you were buried, it must have been late afternoon.

I remember, Anita, how the weakness suddenly came on me, and I sank to the ground by your grave. I remember the burning sensation that suddenly flared over the whole of my body. I remember lying there, with my cheek against the soil. And I remember the sudden, unexpected fit of vomiting, and how my vomit was greedily sucked up by the parched earth of your grave. And I remember how the weakness grew worse, and the burning on my skin became agony. And I remember how, just now, my vision was blotted out, and how I began to sink, to fall into blackness.

I remember realising, a second ago, that I have only a little while left to live. And in this last few seconds, my own words come back to me, to mock me with their irony.

"We always want to hurt those we love."

I remember, you bastards! **YOU BLEEDING HUMAN BASTARDS, I REMEMBER!"**

She was the symbol of what her tottering society needed—the Earth Mother, Joan of Arc and . . .

ANDROMEDA

Clifford C. Reed

AROUND THE SQUARE the Space Force recruiting posters warred with the sales slogans and the video screens of 21st Century News in a coruscating kaleidoscope of colours. The punctuated passing of the monorail made peaks on the decibel graph over the normal high of 21st Century News and the conglomerate advertising jangles of the competing eateries and drinkeries. "REDS REINFORCE MARS STRONGPOINT—URANUS H BOMB RANGE TO BE ENLARGED—BOMB YOUR BELLY WITH ADAMS ALKS—GO GAMMA GUM—FUN FOR FEMMES AND FILLES FOR FUN."

Cruising helicopter taxis swung clattering across the square's sky, and went their way, and were replaced by fresh ones. High above them the jets came and went, ripping the air.

Only the country cousins, up for the day, removed their smoked glasses to stare, or, overwhelmed by sound, strove to blank it all out.

So far as the ordinary citizen observed, it was a normal Free Speech Sunday. There appeared to be no more than the average number of armoured personnel carriers and pick-up wagons about. There did not seem more riot police about than usual. The licensed marihuana vendors shrilled their wares as usual; the habitués browsed at the pavement porno stands.

In the centre of the square several hundred citizens stood with their personal ear microphones tuned to a speaker on the rostrum. They packed close to the platform, shutting out the activity around them, as a fresh orator moved forward to underline the convic-

tions of the converted, and crystallize the emotions of those not yet committed.

From the upper side of the square, on the steps of one of the buildings, two men watched the scene.

"That the woman?" the civilian asked.

The uniformed man nodded.

"H'm."

The officer looked sideways at the record taker. "This is an important one. Make sure you don't miss a word."

He turned back as the politician spoke. "—trust you are confident you have enough men, captain. A mob is a vicious animal."

"We won't give this one a chance, sir."

They talk too much, the officer thought. They all do. They make the laws, then shake when we apply them.

The woman on the platform began to speak. The officer did not listen. His concentration was reserved for the job. His practiced eyes moved from key point to key point, checking.

A small outburst of catcalling from an area in front of the platform reassured him that the opposition to the movement had forced itself into a position from which to launch an attack. Typical yobbos, they could always be relied upon to provide the authorities with an excuse for moving in on an assembly which it might not be politic to ban. Anti-social morons, they did not appreciate that they were an integral factor in keeping the balance between anarchy and authority.

Reassured that everything moved along the line they had foreseen he permitted the woman's words to register while he waited. Fundamentally, she voiced the same old complaint against the way things were. To hear these people one would think they were the only ones with a conscience—the only ones who cared. When the truth was that they just hadn't got the guts to soldier on up the hill. They were scared because the road wasn't flat, and easy, and *safe*. But she managed to give things a new twist. That was what made her potentially dangerous.

"—you are here because you are hungry for life, and all you are offered everywhere else is death. Slogans

instead of ideals, and suspicion instead of brotherhood. The system does not trust brotherhood. It is afraid of it. The system is a dyke against the sea of freedom, and inside the dyke we have made a desert. Because this is the age of the System Man. The time of the bloated belly, and the mind which responds only to greed and fear. Loyal to nothing except his own advantage. Never taking a stand, but shifting his feet every time the system lurches."

The officer's mind switched off the speaker when the opposition began to fling missiles at the platform, when the scuffles started, and his men moved in to subdue the disturbances. He went forward, climbed on to the platform, and announced that the meeting was closed. The battlers of each faction were loaded up, and taken away. The conveners of the meeting were escorted to other vans.

"Are we being charged with an offence?" the chairman asked.

White haired, shrivelled, the chairman had decades of opposition to authority behind him. This officer was only the latest of a line that stretched back. He wasn't a person. Only a face, something which gave an appearance to a uniform. Always the same face, and the same set mind, speaking the same formulas; a mind which no one could penetrate.

They were not being charged. For the preservation of order, to avoid provoking incidents, for their own safety, they were being removed from where public passions might be inflamed.

"A handful of hooligans!" The woman was contemptuous. "Do you think people won't see through that? What is the real reason?"

But they urged her into the van with the chairman and the others of the committee.

As the days piled up, others came to join them in the camp.

"This isn't the only one they've set up," a new arrival reported. "They've pulled in hundreds of people. They've used the same excuse everywhere."

"'Protective custody'" the woman quoted. "Protec-

tion for whom? Us!"

"In my country the same thing happens," another newcomer told them. "The governments work together also. I think, if I can get here, it will be different. But when the plane lands, the police here are waiting for me."

The mosaic built up piece by piece as facts filtered through. The atmosphere outside was hardening against the nonconformists. The more objectors taken into protective custody, the more accurate the term became.

"When they took me out of the house," the latest arrival said, "the crowd tried to break through the cordon."

"Why?" the woman demanded. It was no use asking the other captives. They did not know. "Why?" she challenged the guards. "Why, suddenly, do you stop ignoring us?"

"You're wasting your breath," the chairman said.

"While I have breath, I'll keep asking."

"They don't mean to answer."

"That's mad."

He shook his head. "They're not mad. Not that way. What does worry me is how long they'll keep up the suspense."

He was tired. And old. Too tired and old to be everywhere, checking the more and more frequent senseless quarrels, the growing inward-turning apathy which were manifestations of prison mentality.

It was when these signs showed that the suspense ended. The authorities had waited for these, had fostered them. Because when they showed strongly the next stage would have been reached. Indoctrination could begin.

"You are anarchists. What is good enough for the ordinary citizen is not good enough for you. You think you are superior to your neighbour. You look on him as a sheep because he is comfortable among his fellows. You think your morals and your judgments are superior to his common sense."

No violence. Only the day and night, never-ceasing insistence of the hammering loud-speakers. No flesh and blood opponents to refute, but canned arguments which went on, and on, and on.

After a week all the weaker rebels had been weeded out, removed to other centres. From which, when they were safely cleansed, they could be fed back into normal society. For those who still held fast, there was more pressure on another flank.

They had stuffed their ears with cloth against the canned voices. Now they would have to close their eyes. Overnight, posters bloomed all around the camp, accusing, exhorting. The pointing finger, "Why are *You* still in prison? Don't you want to be *Free*?"

The signs and slogans, static and mute, could be shut out by mental discipline. But movement caught the eye, was harder to ignore. Projectors could be swivelled and aimed at will. Without warning, walls and ceilings, even floors, could come suddenly to life, the message smashing at the prisoners' minds before they had time to shield themselves.

"It's inhuman," the woman protested. Two warders led a man away towards the hospital; a man who stumbled as he walked, a man who laughed, turning his head from side to side. A stream of blood ran down either side of the man's nose. He clutched a pointed piece of metal in one hand. There was blood on the metal.

The woman clung to the chairman's arm. "Why are they doing this to us?"

The blind man was led out of sight, and he looked at the woman. "I think they are afraid," he said.

"Of us? Of *us*!"

She asked again when they were moved. There were not many of them left. Only a few vehicles were needed to transport them to the take-off point. "Where are you taking us?" she asked as they were herded aboard.

She cried as they were strapped down, pleaded for an answer as the orderly gave each of them an injection. Her "Why?" whispered from the bunk until the drug took hold, and they lifted from the launching pad.

Theirs was not the only craft climbing up from Earth but they knew nothing of this, were told nothing. It was the same in every ship which went into orbit around Earth, took up its position, became a unit of the convoy rumbling away from Earth. Only when the ships had

made their landings, and they were brought out, did they know. When each one looked up and saw Earth in the sky, far off, far removed, inaccessible.

Their quarters were ready for them, clean, bright, modern. Throughout the ages those in power had dug below the surface to make their dungeons. Darkness was a stone they had used to crush the captive's spirit. The new technique was designed from the opposite viewpoint. The most obstinate cases were not to be denied sight of what was dear to them. The prison was laid out so that they could not avoid seeing. The outer walls of the galleries and cells were transparent so that Earth must always be visible, day and night. Earth was the bait, and Earth was the reward. Recant, conform, and there was a place on the rocket.

There was no violence. There had been no physical violence from the beginning. Nothing permanent was ever achieved by needless brutality, nothing constructive. That was the essence of the age.

"It's not just our people," the woman reported to the chairman where he lay resting. "Every government has sent people. There's every religion you can think of, and every kind of politics."

"So that is what it means. They've weeded out all the goats."

"And kept the sheep." The woman followed the chairman's eyes to where Earth shone, beautiful against the surrounding dark. "Hell must be like that," she said. "It looks lovely from a long way off. But, when you're not allowed a mind of your own, where you're only a robot—"

The old man moved his head slowly to look at her. "This is hell," he said. "Here. Hell is when there are things to do, things you want to do, and can't. A paralysed man knows what hell means. A dying man knows."

She was shocked. This was something she had never considered. The chairman had always been there. It was inconceivable that he would not be there always. "You can't give in," she protested. "Not you!"

"Give in?" He considered this. "No, I'm not doing that. I'm withdrawing. The sort of world I believe in

does not exist. It never has existed, of course, but I could believe in it. I've given my life to that belief. I don't regret that, even though I can see, now, that I've always been against the tide."

"What about the rest of us?" she pleaded.

His head moved on the pillow. "Not you. Myself only. For you, in your time, the tide may turn. I don't know. You must decide that for yourself."

He only spoke once after that. He lay, with his eyes on the view. "It's very beautiful, isn't it?" he asked. He died soon after that, peacefully.

The doctor who came when she reported what had happened was young. It surprised her that he treated the old man's body with respect.

"You don't have to be insincere," she flamed. "Aren't you satisfied with killing him?"

"He killed himself."

"He imprisoned himself, also, I suppose. Exiled himself. Is that what we're to say? That you haven't done a thing? We've done it to ourselves!"

She ran at him, tried to strike him. He held her arms.

"I won't say it," she shrieked. "It's mad. You want to drive us all mad."

The orderlies had her now, drew her back. A hand appeared under her nose holding a sedative phial. Before she could jerk away the fingers crushed the container.

They could release her then, let her sink into a chair. She watched dispassionately as they removed the chairman's body.

THE DOCTOR STAYED. "I want to talk to you," he said.

She wondered why he wanted this. She did so objectively, without emotion, the way a robot would wait to hear the reason. They had had to give her a chemical to bring her to this state; they did this to the weaker ones by controlling their minds. They were out to make everyone like that.

"I don't want to see you go under," the doctor told her.

She examined this statement, analysed it. It did not make sense. All that had been done to them had been

designed to crush their resistance. Now this man stated that he did not desire this. Why? Why her?

"There are other people—other prisoners—who have more influence than I have."

"I am not thinking of influence. Their importance will not last much longer. In a few days they will come to terms."

"Not all." She could believe that she was being exact. Some minds would never crack.

"Within a week," he said, "most of them will ask to be taken back." He waved at the window. "There is Earth. Day and night, there it is. With all its memories. It's home. The only thing to stop people from returning is their own obstinacy. In the end the view will beat them."

He shook his head. "Intimidation and propaganda can achieve only so much. Inevitably they build up resistance. Emotion is the only thing which will undermine this resistance. So that's what you have here. No pressure. Except for what you generate yourself. Against yourself. You are your own gaoler. The gates will open the moment you agree to release yourself. The promised land—home—freedom." He waved his hand again. "There it all is. Waiting for you to come back."

"Why have you told me this? Me, and not the others?"

"If you had not needed my attention you would be in the assembly hall now with your associates being told this."

She recalled that she had heard movement in the corridor, feet tramping past.

"That's all," he said. "It's up to you." He went out.

She heard her companions returning, already formulating the phrases they would declaim at the inevitable debate which they were already convening. "If they tell us we are our own gaolers we shall prove to them that the integrity of our spirit is stronger than their distorted assessments."

It was as sincere as it was indignant. Faced with the indifference of the authorities the indignation of the captives fed on itself, swelled to apoplectic heights, and

then—burnt itself out. The authorities waited. They did not have to wait long. Once the first defection took place, the draining away from the ranks was steady.

"It is defeat," the doctor commented. His visits no longer pretended to result from her medical condition. "They will go back, and they will be more conformist than people who have never rebelled. They will always have to cover up the scar of knowing they failed. It will make them more severe when it is their turn to deal with future rebels."

"Knowing this," she wondered, "you can still be a party to it?"

"I am a doctor. I am responsible for their physical state. Not for their being here." He shrugged. "I am not responsible for what they have made of themselves, or will make. What, through their own attitudes, they bring on themselves."

"Pontius Pilate, M.D."

He did not take offence. "You say that because you are biased. You are right. You must be right because that is how things appear to you. I am wrong because I do not accept your values. You would not be human if you were not always sure that yours was the correct viewpoint. That, of course, is why you are here now."

"Why are we here?" she demanded. "I have asked that since we were first imprisoned. Why? Why must we be forced into conforming? Why now, more than at any other time?"

"Because we're in danger."

"We?"

"The world. Everybody. Humanity. We've come to a brick wall."

"I wish you'd stop being figurative."

"Sorry." He smiled, reaching for her hand, holding it.

One of the few remaining intractibles, seeing them, muttered a rudeness as he passed.

"They say I'm not one of them now," she murmured. "They say I have gone over to your side."

"Have you?"

She shook her head, but she did not take her hand away. "You were telling me why they are doing this

to us," she reminded him.

"Yes. It started with the atomic balance of power. While that lasted, and with the first space efforts, there was a degree of stability. The world of that time was vulnerable. It appreciated that. Equally, it *knew* that it was on the threshold. That was positive, so people could live with the negative danger. Then, when the moon was reached, that was a concrete triumph. It didn't matter who did it, or what country he came from, he was Man. After that—Mars. Again, not the language of the astronaut, but the over-all figure of Man. Homo sapiens. Reaching out. Starting out the road of his destiny." He paused. "That was fifty years ago."

"We're still going forward."

"Are we? How much further have we got? We're still inside our Solar System. That means we're still in our own back yard. We're beginning to suspect that it's a prison yard."

He released her hand, leaned forward, scowling at the floor. "That's the trouble with living on dreams. You've got to wake up. The romantic ideas of deep space, other galaxies, meeting sentient beings on other systems, explorers, missionaries, crusaders. It looks, to-day, as though all those dreams are going sour on us. So far, and no farther. That's the position at the moment. Time warps, and faster than light drives, the gimmicks of pseudo science, that sort of stuff, we didn't realise it, but unconsciously we've been bluffing ourselves on that level. Unthinking optimism, taking progress for granted. It's like a dangerous drug. When the supply is cut off, the addict goes to pieces."

"What has this to do with us?"

"Everything. And don't say 'us.' I'm not interested in the others. Only you. Personally. No. Don't interrupt, please. I've got an unpleasant feeling that this set-up isn't going to continue its sweet reasonableness for much longer. If that happens, I want you safe."

"Go on," she said. She loved him. He loved her. It was natural that he should worry about her. Now was not the time to talk about loyalty to one's convictions. That would solve itself, no doubt. "Go on."

"You've got to see this. Personally. Up to the present because we were still going forward, we, everyone, the world could afford optimism. We could tolerate minority points of view, self-appointed prophets. Now, we've stopped going forward. It may be only temporary, but, while it lasts, and as soon as the average citizen gets it into his head that the position isn't as easy and rosy as he'd been led to understand it was, there's going to be trouble. The bigger disruptive forces, the old political quarrels, all the old shibboleths, are going to be remembered, revived. The old nationalistic suspicions and animosities that have been in cold storage are going to become issues again. With a very dangerous difference. It isn't just two or three countries balanced and poised. It's little countries as well nowadays who have nuclear weapons.

"You don't have to be a genius to work out that there's only one solution that gives us a chance. If this world is going to survive it'll only be because everyone's mind is held in innocuous channels. Any point of view, if it's pushed, sets up a counter action. It can be the most trivial prejudice, it can be as fair and reasonable as the holder believes it to be. It's just as capable of generating friction. You can't risk sparks in an arsenal. Fortunately, this was appreciated well in advance. There was a common need and there was common action. Now, there's only a few of you left. If it can be announced, quickly, that everyone here has accepted rehabilitation, it will make things easier back on Earth. It's not everyone who is told why there's a vital need, the average man won't be, he's not developed enough, but you people who have stood out, you're the ones who can work most effectively among them."

She had listened to him. Now she exploded. "Are you mad? Are they mad? Do you have the nerve to think I would ever accept this—this claptrap?" She pushed his hand away, sprang up from the seat, glaring down at him. "You, of all people, to say this. You said you loved me. I believed you. I was a fool to believe you."

"No. You've got to—"

"I've got to do nothing of the sort. People aren't ants. You can't make them into ants. Not from any reason or pretence. They may have brain washed you, I see they must have done, but they won't do it to me." Almost she spat at him. "For you to say this! You! Because I loved you you thought I'd swallow whatever lies you told me. Well, I won't. And I never want to speak to you again."

There was, however, no one to whom she could carry her outrage. She was no longer trusted by the other detainees. Also, when she began to speak, she found them uneasy. Clearly they had been offered the same story, and they did not trust themselves.

There was no place where she could go to be alone. Except Earth. If she recanted they would let her go back. If she was prepared to be a robot, a sheep, and work to make other people sheeplike, keep them that way.

"I won't," she swore. "I won't let them beat me."

EVERY DAY MADE it harder to hold out. The turncoats were leaving steadily now. The authorities were winning with a rush. Where once there had been thousands, where, later, there had been hundreds, now there were scores. Then—little frightened groups. The last two days, walking along the empty corridors, she did not meet more than a dozen, scattered, individuals, sullen, uncommunicative, mistrustful. Eyeing her, not speaking, ostentatiously moving always with their backs to the windows through which Earth beckoned, repeating the message over and over. "I am Earth, the mother, come back, wayward child. Come back."

They cracked, one by one, as the hours passed on the last day. Were led away, muttering, crying, stumbling on the supporting arms of the guards.

There was only herself left.

"You may as well come too," the officials urged. "There isn't any point now in being obstinate. There's nothing to be gained. One person, against the whole world. What can one person do?"

She did not know what gave her the strength to hold on. Perhaps it was the fact that they did not expect

her to be strong enough. Somehow, she was.

They let her watch the news flashes. The announcement that the rehabilitation policy had been successful; the scenes of the return to Earth of the last batch of detainees.

Earth was once more a smooth functioning mechanism. The pieces of grit had been wiped off the gears, the lubricating oil of a renewed belief in the irresistible progress of man filmed the cogs so that they might spin safely.

There was no mention that one unit still persisted pointlessly in her self-isolation. It wasn't as though she could keep it up. By tomorrow the figure of one hundred per cent success would be correct.

Except that she was still there when tomorrow came. And the day after that. What had been a harmless anticipation of the inevitable revealed itself as an error which could undo everything that had been achieved. When almost by accident, it was realised that not all the staff had been withdrawn from the Luna Galleries. That some still remained. Even a solitary prisoner needed some guards. Rumour spread. Soon it was suggested that many were still in exile, that the reports of the authorities were without foundation.

A formula had to be found quickly.

It was done with skill. The figures given to the people were correct. The campaign had been a complete success. There had been no false statement regarding this. Any apparent discrepancy was due to misunderstanding the reason why one woman had not returned to Earth. It was because of her state of health. The medical officer in charge had refused to permit her to travel until she was stronger.

The doctor had come into the room just before she heard the official statement. He had not spoken. He had not approached her. He had taken a seat a little distance away, and waited.

She had wondered why he had come. But when she heard the statement it became obvious that he had known what was going to be said.

"What will they say when I don't get well enough?"

she challenged.

He stood up, and came towards her, stood over her, looking down. His face was set.

After a while—"I warned you," he said. "I had a feeling that things could get out of control. They have. So—the people at the top have had to commit themselves. There can't be any going back now on what they've been forced into saying. There's too much at stake to be over-sensitive."

She quivered. She shrank back in her seat. It wasn't the words he used. The words could have meant anything. It was the tone, and the expression on his face, the angry impotence and the resignation.

He dropped down beside her, took her hands. "Steady," he said. "God help you, be brave a little longer. God help us both," he said.

The tears came. "They're going to kill me. That's it, isn't it? They couldn't make me give in, so they're going to murder me."

His hands moved higher. He had his arms around her. She fought to rise but his weight held her.

"I don't want to die," she sobbed. "If I say I've changed. I'll do what they want—" ,

"It's too late."

"No! I heard what they said. That I've been cured. I'll promise not to say anything."

"It's too late. Do you think they haven't thought of that? They have. But not everything came over the news. It must have been the staff. Some of those who went back. They must have talked. And it spread. Like fever. These weeks. Emotion's been building up. When the rumours began about you being the only one here all that emotion got triggered off. Symbols. Joan of Arc and the Man in the Iron Mask. The Princes in the Tower. Somehow, they had to find an answer that would stop all this feeling from blowing up."

There had been an inexorable decision. The sense of this came through to her, stilling further protest. That, and the pain in him. Pain because he loved her, and she was going to die, and there was no way in which he could save her.

Another thought came to her. "Will they tell you to do it?" she asked.

"It's not like that," he answered. He pulled himself up, went away, over to the windows.

Her eyes followed him. Over his shoulder a point of light was rushing towards them out of the blackness around Earth. Her attention was caught only momentarily, until she saw that he, too, watched the oncoming vessel. He stood, his hands gripping the frame, staring at the light, rigid and tense...

Apprehension caught her. "What is it?"

He answered, not turning round. "The brick wall. We're trying to break out. Because we've got to. No matter what. No matter who gets hurt. This ship coming. It's big. It's bigger than anything before. It's a joint effort. It'll start its drive from the edge of our system. If we don't get through this time, we've got to come close enough to have a hope that next time we will."

"They're sending me."

"Yes."

"It won't come back."

"It—doesn't have to come back."

She couldn't take it in. Not properly. But she could feel the horror of the emptiness, the hopelessness, the absolute and utter solitude. The darkness and the cold.

"How many are going? Who else?"

They had told him before he came into the room. "You could have been replaced, doctor. Normally, you would have been. But this isn't a normal situation. She's got to go on that ship, and it's your job to see that she gets told the way that does the least harm. Doctor, don't waste our time asking again to take her place. You've been told why you can't. Because for this run only one person goes, and she's been named as the volunteer, and that's the only safe way there is to contain the feeling that's growing about her. You've got ten minutes, doctor, and when it's over you can cut your throat, or do it with drink, or however you choose, but meanwhile you'll obey orders because you know as well as we do that this is bigger than one person or two, and get moving."

"Only you," he said. "No one else."

She hurled herself off the seat, ran to him, seized him. She twisted so that she was between him and the window, blocking out the moving light.

"You won't do it. You won't let them lock me in that, and send me out there. You'll stop them—"

"I can't."

"Don't say that." Her mouth on his, her hands on him. "You've got to. You love me. You won't let them."

She did not hear his denial, would not hear. He loved her. Therefore he could not do this. She loved him. She did. She swore it. What did she have to do to prove it. Kneel to him? Look, she was kneeling. She was kissing his feet. She—

She stopped. Slowly, very slowly, she lifted her head, staring up at his face.

She stood up. He put out his hand to help her, and she twisted away from it. "Don't touch me," she said. "I'll go. Only don't touch me. Don't come near me."

"I'm sorry."

"Don't talk to me. Anybody else. But not you."

They came to fetch her as she spoke. The senior officer of the station with his staff. They did not speak. He gave her a moment. She was the type, he judged, who could be emotional in private, but who would not let the mask slip abroad.

When she came forward, after only the briefest hesitation, he knew he had judged correctly. She was a thoroughbred. He walked beside her along the corridor.

At the landing bay a ferry waited. The commander held his salute until she had climbed up out of sight. He brought his hand down then.

"Your gear's aboard," the second in command told the doctor. "Don't hang about."

The commander had moved away when the woman had gone from sight. The second followed his example, turning his back on the doctor. If they had been in the doctor's position they would have obeyed their orders, or not obeyed them. If they had obeyed they would not have looked for any respect. That was all there was to it.

The ferry slipped away from the mooring bay, leaped out to meet the approaching, braking monster. Turned on the same course, and closed. The magnetic ends of the cables sprang out and held. The cables were reeled in until the ferry latched on to the space ship. The ports grounds together, outer flange to outer flange, and made a seal.

"Contact green," a crewman reported. "Gangway at standard pressure."

The ferry captain activated the ports.

"Clear for passage."

ON EARTH THE news gatherers and dispensers were at their wits' ends. Here was the human interest story of all time, and there was no coverage. No proper reporting. A woman was challenging the unknown, was going into the night, alone, knowing that she would not return, and they were not given access to her.

Consideration for a heroine's personal wishes was one thing, but the authorities should remember that they had a duty to the people. Had they forgotten that she had not been so sensitive in the days when she had been opposed to the law?

The official flashes of her boarding the ferry were amateurish. The official commentary had as much drama as last week's weather forecast.

There was still time. The Star Seeker was moving up slowly to the start line. A cruiser could overtake it, a fast ship with half a dozen front-rank news men, and women. The people had a right to know more about the woman. More than just the one shot of her climbing the ferry ladder.

What did she think? What did she feel? What had made her decide? Her life—the good, the sad. Bring her to life. Make her smile. Cry. Tear her open. Apart. Push her. Crowd her. No fancy holding back because it wasn't good taste. Get in. Get answers. Make her talk. Talk. Talk.

It's too late for a cruiser. There's still time for a hook-up. Moon Base to Star Seeker. The sound and vision equipment installed in Star Seeker were designed for inter-

stellar transmission. There isn't any technical difficulty.

It's not only for people here and now. It's for posterity. It's not sensationalism. It is knowledge, understanding; what compels some human beings to give up every single tie because of an ideal, what makes Man what he is.

It's too late for that now. It is too late for anything now except to wish her "Godspeed." She is not for us a flesh and blood person now. She is an ideal. She is Andromeda, lonely at the edge of the expanse, from whom all have withdrawn. She is a legend. A dream. She is the Earth Mother, a star in the sky, a dream at dawn and dusk. For her, now, there is no past. There is only a brief present, before she goes into the eternal future. She does not belong to us now. She belongs to those who will come after us. Farewell.

It had been a careful run to the start line. All other traffic had been warned off a collision course. The route had been designed to intercept the paths of as many members of the solar system as was convenient. The automatic devices must all be tested before the ship was freed to hurl itself across the void. The ship must twist and turn and thereafter return impeccably to its course after taking avoiding action. It must be awake all the time. The ship must captain itself.

The human being it was to carry with it had no professional ability. The human being was there to be tested. The survival rating demanded of future human beings would be evaluated from readings of the metering devices flashed back to the actuaries of survival waiting with their tables and their electronic calculators.

"It will work as designed," one of the observers of the multi-national passengers stated.

"The ship? Yes. But—her?"

Their eyes turned to where the woman sat alone. The doctor sat nearby, but they did not look at him. They did not want to look at him, speak with him, have any communication with him beyond what was unavoidable. They were not proud of their part, but they felt themselves fouled by him.

"If she dies too soon?"

"There is no reason to believe she will, Colonel

General. Physically—”

“Even physically. A wild animal will escape captivity by dying. She has that look, Comrade Space Marshal.”

The five star general shrugged. “That’s the chance we’ve got to take, gentlemen. Politically, it has to be her. There isn’t any argument about that.”

They nodded.

“Emotionally, the world is united around her. For the moment. For long enough, we hope, to give us the data we’ve got to have if a fully manned ship is to have a better than even chance.”

“The attempt may still fail, Comrade General. My government has stressed that possibility. We cannot have certainty.”

“There’s certainty about one thing.” The Space Marshall voiced what was in all three minds. “If Star Seeker fails there’ll be only one outlet for the ensuing frustration. We’ll be at one another’s throats within a month.”

“My government’s peace-loving intentions are well known. We will never initiate—”

“Nobody will. It’ll just happen. Inevitably. That’s why this has got to succeed. The ship’s got to function, and the passenger’s got to live. She’s damn well got to live until she’s so far away that the signals can’t be picked up.”

“After that I can die.”

They had not thought that she listened. She had acted dead since she came aboard. Now she shocked them by being alive.

“After that, I don’t matter. I can be scrapped. Because people don’t matter to you, do they? They’re just units. Counters.”

“You’re wrong,” the five star general said.

“I’m not wrong,” she denied. “If you had a heart you couldn’t do this to anyone. Even if you hated them. Not to die like this. Not—to die.”

“Because of other people,” the space marshal tried. “All the people on Earth. To give them a chance.”

“Not like this. Not with lies. Torturing someone who can’t defend themselves. Killing them as slowly

as you can. Gloating over it with your charts. She's lost another drop of blood. Her count's down. Her mind's going. The brain impulses are becoming erratic. Don't pretend to look shocked. I could understand what you've been talking about even though you thought I wasn't taking it in."

A light winked on the control panel. The Star Seeker was at the designated point, was stopped, was hanging at that spot. Impulses located the rendezvous ship, threw its shape on the screen, signalled it to approach.

"Link your patient up," the five star general commanded the doctor.

They watched as the doctor moved forward. As he took a bracelet and clipped it on her wrist. She would not be able to remove the bracelet with its spring lock. It would record her pulse. It would transmit its reading to the master controls behind the panelling, and these readings would in turn be transmitted by the ship's long range senders, day and night, waking and sleeping, until she died.

He fixed a diadem around her head.

She would not be encumbered by these devices, nor the others he locked on her. They were shaped, they were light in order not to cause discomfort, and strong so that she could do them no damage. They would record all her physical reactions for as long as she continued to live. They were tell-tale jewels whose messages were essential to those who planned now for the ship and the crew who would follow her.

She had flinched when the doctor set the first spy upon her wrist, when his fingers touched her. After that she gave no sign. Until he finished, and stepped back against the wall.

He had done what he had been brought to do. He had served as a precaution should her medical state deteriorate during the run up.

Now his usefulness was ended. He would be taken off with his superiors. Not from choice. They knew all that had taken place between him and the woman. He had obeyed the orders he had been given, and they had nothing but contempt for him.

"If I had been in his shoes," the five star general thought, "I'd have strangled her. If I loved her. If? That's the answer, of course. He never did love her. Then why did he make her think he did?"

"He's a bastard," the space marshal decided in his mind. "To think we've got to take him back safe. And send her. She's worth a million of him. It's a damn shame."

"What does the comrade doctor think?" the colonel general asked himself. "What is happening behind that face and that correct posture? What devil is laughing? Because of the disgust for him which we must not express."

The rendezvous ship had drawn alongside. Had made contact, been aligned. The entry ports drew back in each vessel, making the passageway. The time had come to leave.

"Before you go," she said.

They waited. It was her privilege to speak. It could make no difference to them. It must not make any difference. Whatever pity they might feel must not be shown. That was their trade. They were at the tops of their professions, and their craft was death. If war came they must deal in the deaths of millions. To protect their own sanity they manufactured terms such as megadeaths to describe such genocidal actions, men, women and children were classed as population percentages. The houses of Attila and of Malthus were united, and Roland was put out into the street. They did not desire that the test should come, they took a host of precautions to curtail the possibility, but, if it should happen, they would not shrink to use the weapons they had developed.

To prevent it from happening was one reason why they were killing her. Her death, in this fashion, could be the means of averting a tide of deaths. "It is expedient that one man should die for the people." The sentence rose in the space marshal's memory. They were crucifying her from the noblest motives. That did not make it easier. It only made it inevitable. Nothing she could say would make any difference.

"I don't want to die. I want to live. That's why I

joined. Because we all believed in living. We weren't afraid of living. But that didn't suit you. You didn't believe in that. So you smashed the best hope this world had. You made everybody like yourselves, those who didn't go mad, or die. So that now there isn't anyone on Earth who can call his soul his own. They're robots. They're not human beings any more.

"You think you've won, but you haven't. Because if there are other beings out there they'll be just as clever as you are. They'll track this ship back to where it came from, and they'll be just as ruthless as you are. They'll know what it means if you start coming. They'll be logical. There won't be any hypocrisy. They'll just annihilate you. You and all the robots you've turned people into, and the universe will be cleaner after they've done."

They did not speak.

"I hope there is something after this," she whispered. "I hope there is a hell. I hope you're in it, all of you, for ever—for ever—"

They were not so cruel as to speak. Just go away through the passage, and close the ports. The Star Seeker's ports would close automatically. They would pull away in the rendezvous ship. When they had put the prescribed interval between the ships they would send the signal. It would be picked up by the Star Seeker, and the monster would begin to move.

The five star general jerked his head at the doctor, ordering him out first.

The man waiting against the wall nodded. He had not moved until now, had not spoken. His face had shown nothing, resented nothing. But now his hand moved, and they saw the container he held.

"Gas," he said.

"LET'S NOT WASTE time on how I got it," he said. "You know what'll happen if I drop it. The air flow system will whip it through both these ships before—"

"We don't need a lecture," the five star general growled. "I'm warning you, you're making a bad bargain."

The colonel general pushed out his lower lip. "No!"

he declared. "We do not bargain. The woman goes. You do not go. That is all."

"You'll only make it worse for her." The space marshal's voice was deliberately reasonable. "If we did allow you to blackmail us it would only change things temporarily. Your defiance of discipline could not be permitted to succeed. The crew would be taken off the nearest ship, and she would be put on board, and sent after you. You would be responsible for the extra mental suffering she would have to bear."

"You bastard," the woman said. "You devil. You'd do that. You'd do it, and be smug about it." She swung her head from side to side. "There isn't any way out. Whatever happens, you mean to kill me."

She glared at the doctor. "There *is* a way to beat them, though. If you give me that. Then go. I'll break it when you're gone. It'll be quick."

"No!" the five star general barked. "That's an order, doctor. You're not to hand it over. I warn you—"

"I'm not giving it to anyone," the doctor said. "You're all wrong. This business has gone mad. It's gone bad. Because it started off wrong, and it got worse along the way." His mouth twisted, and he shook his head. "My thinking wasn't right either, so I can't point any superior finger."

"I thought you said we shouldn't waste time."

The man with the grenade lifted one shoulder, spread out a hand. "What do you want, marshal? As things are, it's a deadlock."

"I would like to hear." The colonel general rubbed his chin. "It does not change anything but I have interest in why you attempt this."

"Talk!" the woman screamed. "Talk! Oh, God! What are you all? Can't you see I'll go mad? Talk. Talk. Talk. Why can't you kill me now?"

She tumbled towards the doctor, tried to reach the grenade. He held her off, and she lurched towards the other men. She pawed each one, and each held his face rigid, held himself rigid, and she sighed, and shook her head, and reeled over to the nearest seat. She sat down, her mouth hanging open, her eyes wide, her hands mov-

ing in her lap.

"Go on," the five star general said. "You can't make it worse than it is. You'd better finish."

"I'll finish," the doctor spat. He pointed to the woman. "That's your answer. That's how it started. Fear. Fear of what might happen. That's the way the people at the top were. They could see what they thought was coming, and they couldn't see a way out. The only thing they could think of was to freeze everything, get time work out a solution. Meanwhile nobody must breathe, nobody must look sideways, or hold his nose.

"Oh, it sounded logical. I believed it. Most people did. If, somehow, one way or another, we could halt the rush, just coast, that'd give us a chance to see what road we were on, and where it went. Time to look at the map, and find out where we were.

"So, we did that. And we got an answer. If we all got together, and everybody worked together, we'd have a hope of not destroying ourselves." He nodded. "As though we haven't been told that all through history. However."

"Come to the point."

"I'm there. What we did we did regardless. The individual wasn't important. If he got hurt, too bad. It was the overall good which was supreme."

"Well?"

"No. I say no. You can't have overall good if you don't care about the individual. For me, that meant her. It still does. But I didn't dare come out and say that in public. Because by that time the mess-up over the hundred-per-cent conversions had happened, and anyone with any logic could see what that meant for her. She was going to be the sacrifice.

"There wasn't any way I could stop it. The way she was watched the last few days I couldn't have tried anything. If I tried, and failed, there was no one who would help her. So I obeyed orders." He moved the hand with the weapon. "Until now.

"Wait," he said. "I know someone's got to go. We've got to try, and we've got to try here and now. But I say she doesn't go by herself, either in this ship, or what-

ever ship comes first to hand. She doesn't go alone."

He hefted the grenade. "There it is, gentlemen. I'll start a count-down now. If you're not aboard that other ship and pulling away mighty fast I'm going to smash this on the floor. In which case you, or whoever comes after you if you're not quick enough, is going to have to find another volunteer. Because you'll be dead as well as us."

"Before you start counting—"

"Well?"

"If you force this on us—this ship—"

"—was calculated to carry one person. Was fuelled and provisioned on those calculations. I know that. And I tell you I don't give a damn. That's your problem. Good bye, gentlemen."

When the ports slid to after they had gone his eyes moved to the screen. The rendezvous ship changed shape, grew narrow, grew steadily smaller. He waited on. Until the moving spot on the screen halted.

The signal would come any moment now.

Before it came she spoke.

"I wanted to live," she said. "Was that too much to want?"

"Too much for you," he answered. "Too much for me also."

She shook her head. "Didn't you want to live?" she wondered.

He crossed over to her, knelt down beside her. He put the grenade in her lap. "I'll break my word," he said. "You say you wanted to live. Well, you can live until we're out of food. Half the time you would have lived by yourself if you'd gone alone. Or you can break that now, and not drag it out. You're going to die whatever happens. I tried to make it endurable for you. But now you must decide. To go on together, and give the people back on Earth hope, or say to hell with them. They did this to you. They aren't worth trying to help. You'll take the quick, easy way out, and spite them. Let them kill each other and good riddance to them."

He sat back on his heels.

Her hand closed on the grenade. She stared at him. "If I do it?" she asked, "what will you think? Your last thought, what will it be?"

"I don't know," he answered. "I don't honestly know. I'd hope it'd be a good one. One that would make up for a lot of things. Not just about me." He shrugged. "I'm not counting on that, though. We all fool ourselves. It could be I'm not such a shining light as I bluff myself I am. I expect it'd show then." He shrugged again. "I don't know. I'll just hope."

"Hope." She looked down at the grenade. "If I throw this, that means I don't believe in hope, doesn't it? That means that all I can think of is myself. Of being afraid. Of being selfish enough to destroy what you've tried to do to help me." She shook her head. "That wouldn't be a good last thing to think, would it? That I didn't deserve to live because I wasn't worth your sacrificing yourself to help me."

She lifted the weapon, and passed it back to him. "There'll be some place where you can put that until the right time comes," she said. She gave him her other hand. "I won't need to be ashamed of my last thought then, will I?"

The light flashed on the control panel.

In the next

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HE OPENED HIS eyes and looked at a stranger.

"Fendor!" The voice was desperate with urgency, the face distorted with strain. "Fendor, listen to me..."

The words meant nothing, were just a dull succession of sounds without form or meaning. He turned, the stranger vanishing, becoming as if he never was, the

vibration of his words a muted irritation. Before him a hedge sprang into being, green leaves on thin brown sticks the whole dotted with tiny blossoms. The hedge became a house, a mass of window-punctured brick seeming to hang suspended in the sky. The sky was a limitless expanse of white-dotted blueness into which he must surely fall. A terrible yellow brilliance seared his vision with painful hurt. He closed his eyes and the universe was nothing but an endless blackness. He opened them and, when again he could see, the hedge, the house, the sky, the sun, all had been erased. Now he stared at a stretch of grey slabs...the black dip of a road...the vista of a street. The images followed one on the other, each new, each different.

"Fendor!" A man stood before him, appearing from nothingness. His head and torso grew larger, larger, his legs vanishing as he grew. Fendor looked at the stranger who had suddenly appeared inches before him.

"Fendor, please pay attention." Sweat shone on the stranger's forehead, sunshine gleamed from his oiled, thinning hair. His eyes held the glaze imparted by contact lenses. "Look at me," he ordered. "I'm Gregson, you know me."

Sound came from the right, a snarling road of naked power. The stranger vanished, in his place appeared a long, low, black car. For a moment it existed and then was gone. A woman pushing a pram took its place. A man reading a paper took hers. A wind-blown leaf took his. The leaf was replaced by a stranger.

"I'm Gregson," he said patiently. "You know me, Fendor. You have known me for a long time." He leaned forward, his eyes suddenly huge and filling the world. "What's the use?" he said hopelessly. "You can't understand."

There was nothing to understand. There was only a succession of images, a succession of sounds.

A stranger appearing from nowhere and the word 'you.'

A stranger appearing from nowhere and the word 'can't.'

A stranger appearing from nowhere and the word

‘understand.’

A stranger standing before him, filling his vision with his glaring eyes.

Then nothing but blackness, the utter darkness of complete absence of light, the nothingness of pre-creation, the blackness of post-destruction, the deep, engulfing non-existence of death.

“He passed out,” said Gregson. “Not surprising really and probably the best thing which could have happened.”

“How so?” The receiver against his ear was warm, the tiny booth stifling hot, little rivulets of sweat traced their path down his cheeks. Gregson restrained his impatience.

“The human mind not being invincible,” he explained. “I think that Fendor had reached his limit.”

“Then he should be with us not out in the street.” Connault, Gregson knew, had his own conception of what constituted correct procedure. “If anything should happen to him . . .”

“ . . . you will hold me personally responsible. I know.” Gregson dabbed at his neck, running a finger around his soggy collar, doing his best to master his impatience. “The trouble with you, Connault, is that you have too little imagination and understanding. Fendor isn’t a clinical case. He is a human being and deserves to be treated as such. Also, though I shouldn’t have to remind you, he is our friend.”

“I haven’t forgotten,” said Connault. “That is why he should be here.”

“We’ve had all this out before. The clinic is no place for a man in his condition. Like it or not, Connault, natural therapy has its place in the scheme of things. Grass, trees, suburban streets, the familiar scenes of childhood, these can be helpful and soothing when the clinic would be terrifying.”

“Yet he passed out?”

“Yes. He was about to cross a busy street. I restrained him, I had no choice. I don’t like to think of how that restraint must have registered with him. After he collapsed I called a cab and had us driven to the park. This has

been my first opportunity to call you."

"I was getting worried," confessed Connault. "How is he now?"

Gregson had never taken his eyes from the lone figure sitting on the bench beneath the trees. Now he opened the door of the booth, craned out, stared hard at the slumped figure. A faint breeze riffled the upper branches of the surrounding trees and a muted droning came from a flowering shrub heavy with bees. Birds made thin, high twitterings and the sun was a golden benediction. He picked up the receiver.

"All right," he said. "Maybe asleep, I hope so."

"More natural therapy? If there was sarcasm in Connault's voice Gregson ignored it. Both men were worried but, of the two, Gregson had the easier task. Connault could do nothing but sit and wait and waiting can be the hardest task there is.

"It would help if he could sleep," admitted Gregson. "At the least it would save him from some terrible experiences." He fell silent, lost in thought, finally he answered the thin sounds against his ear. "I'm worried," he confessed. "I still think that I'm right but it's a calculated risk. With improvement will come a new factor. I'm afraid of it."

"Of improvement?"

"Of fear."

Gregson hung up the receiver.

The world was a patch of grass, a segment of path, two shoes and two columns of fabric terminating in the shoes. The rest was nothing, a blank unknown and that, somehow, was wrong.

How it was wrong he didn't know and that alone was sufficient to disturb him with a mounting unease. He lifted his head and the world suddenly altered, became an expanse of blue, white and green. He lowered his head and the green remained. Now he looked at trees and watched with dull apathy the movements of their branches. The motion nauseated him so he lowered his head again and studied the ground. He had never seen

it before.

The sense of unease grew stronger.

The ground abruptly fell away. The two columns of fabric vanished, the two shoes moved as of their own volition. Automatically his head lifted and, without warning, he was walking in a void, only the grass and trees and blue sky at which he stared having any reality. He raised his head higher and the greenness vanished so that he saw only the bowl of the sky, the blueness and the searing yellow brilliance painful and terrifying. He lowered his head and stared again at his feet and the ground beneath them.

And unease grew into terror.

He didn't understand.

He was lost and alone in a world he didn't understand.

A world of sheer nightmare.

He began to run, lifting his feet high so that, for a space, neither touched the ground. He halted after only a few steps, the ghastly uncertainty that he would ever touch solid ground making each running step a period of tormented waiting. Instead he began to walk, one foot before the other; his only contact with reality was through the sole of one foot. Before his eyes the world changed and changed and changed again and, each image that he saw was new and different and unpredictable.

Grass . . . trees . . . a path . . . the sky . . . Green, brown, grey, blue, singly and in combination, a chaotic whirl of colour without sense or meaning, constantly altering with each passing second and, all the time, the mounting need within him to know, to understand, to quell the mounting terror.

A man stepped before him, appearing from nothingness, seeming to be created in a flash.

"Fendor. I'm Gregson. Do you know me?"

He knew nothing.

"Listen to me, Fendor. Tell me who I am."

He didn't know. He had never seen the man before.

"Look at me, Fendor. Don't look away."

It was too late. The man vanished, disappeared, uncreated in a flash. Trees swayed where he had stood and, in the distance, the tiny figures of people. He

began to walk towards them, stumbled and, when he looked again they had gone. Once more he was alone.

And then the terror closed in around him so that he fell, hugging the ground, eyes closed and his body curled so that his knees pressed beneath his chin.

"The foetal position?" Connault sounded anxious. "That's bad. Very bad. I think that you should bring him in."

"No." Gregson was definite. He felt it necessary to justify his objection. "Think of the state he must be in, Connault. Out here, among natural surroundings, external shock is at a minimum. What do you think would happen if he saw himself the object of your machines? Your white coats, instruments, all the usual clinical paraphernalia? Damn it, that set-up is enough to frighten a normal man half out of his wits."

"But the foetal position..."

"It's bad, but not entirely unexpected." The inside of the phone booth was hot but hardly enough to account for the sweat streaming from Gregson's face. The strain of his vigil was beginning to tell on him. And Fendor, lying where Gregson had half-dragged, half-carried him, was more than ever an object of concern. Connault mentioned the immediate danger.

"They'll think he's asleep or even drunk" Gregson glanced at his watch. "People aren't usually curious about men lying quietly on the grass. I'll give him a little longer and then try to snap him out of it." He squinted through the glass panes again. "But I'm hoping that he will not need any stimulus. In any case we have an hour or so to spare."

"And if he doesn't snap out of it?"

Gregson remained silent.

"I asked you a question?" Connault was sharp. "Obviously Fendor has improved a little but, as you said, that improvement has its own dangers. Now he feels the need to escape and has done so. Will he remain like that?"

"I don't think so."

"You can't be sure?"

"How can I be sure? How can I tell exactly how

another mind will work? I don't even know for certain how my own mind works, how can I speak for Fendor?" Heat and anxiety reflected themselves in his voice. He was tired, the day had been trying and worst was to come. Soon it would be dark and the park closed. There were few other sanctuaries.

"We can make intelligent assumptions," said Connault. "We know what has happened and what the logical results must be. Surely we can extrapolate."

"From what premise?" Gregson shrugged, forgetting the other could not see his gesture. "This has never happened before and we aren't certain just what has happened. All we can do is to guess and then hope that we've guessed right. So far we've been lucky."

"Lucky? With Fendor in a foetal position?"

"What position do you adopt when asleep and in nightmare? What else is Fendor?" Gregson glanced at his watch again and then at the sky. Like a magnet the solitary figure on the grass attracted his eyes. "I told you that he would experience fear when he improved, well, I was right. Forget that. The next phase is the important one."

"And that is?"

"I'm not certain. First he must overcome fear and that may not be possible. If it isn't then everything finishes here and now. If he recovers then he will have improved even more—just how much is the determining factor. That and his intelligence."

"No need to worry about his intelligence," said Connault.

"I do worry about it," said Gregson sharply. "Think a moment and you'll understand why." He gave the other no time for thought. "Intelligence is the ability to assess and use available data. Now do you understand?"

"Yes." Connault drew a deep breath, the sound of it clear in the receiver. "Poor devil," he said. "The poor, damn unfortunate devil. Take good care of him, Gregson."

The world was a peculiar place full of strange shapes and shifting scenes, a disjointed sequence of events and

happenings without rhyme or reason, a kaleidoscope of form and colour ever new, ever changing but no longer frightening.

He strode from the park knowing that, he as walked, things he had seen an instant before had dissolved into nothingness, reduced themselves to a common non-existence a great pool of non-form, non-shape, non-colour, a negation of what was now before his eyes. And yet, if he should turn, new scenes would spring into being, lasting only as long as his concentration allowed, the time of his need, no longer.

He halted at the edge of the park and stared at the roads, the traffic, the people before him. He waited a moment and then, quickly, turned and stared back the way he had come. Darkness met his eyes. He concentrated and in the darkness, tiny lights sprang into being. He tilted his head and stared upwards to where, dim and small, other lights glowed with transient flickers. He lowered his head and suddenly, where there had been nothing, was the brilliance of shops, the movement of traffic, the jostle of people. There by his will. There because he wished it. There for his own, personal need. And he knew, that when he removed his gaze, there would be nothingness again as before.

His senses swam with the heady power of creation.

"Fendor!" A man stood before him. A small, stooped man, no longer young, his thinning brown hair combed over his skull, his eyes glinting from contact lenses, his grey suit rumpled, his shirt stained with sweat. "You know me, Fendor?"

He turned his head, dismissing the stranger, making him as if he had never been. He took a step forward and bumped into something. He looked at a stranger.

"I'm Gregson. Who are you?"

"Fendor."

It was the first word he had spoken, his first attempt at communication and, for a moment, fear coiled about him and the sense of wrongness returned so that he wanted to fall, to curl, to escape to the world of the womb. Instead he turned, puzzling over the word, savouring it, feeling, as if newly born, the concept of self.

"Fendor! Who am I?"

He faced a stranger and yet, was it a stranger? For a moment he felt unsure. He turned and again faced a small man with thin brown hair and a rumpled grey suit.

"Fendor! Who am I?"

He turned.

"Fendor! Who am I?"

He turned . . . and faced a stranger.

"Fendor! Who am I?"

"Go away!" His head was spinning, this was all wrong. Things vanished when he looked away, they did not obtrude with their senseless questions.

"Fendor! Who are you?"

There was only one answer. From all that he had learned and experienced and knew he could only be one thing. How he knew or how he had grasp of the word to describe himself that remained a mystery. He knew, that was enough.

"God," he said, and knew it to be true.

The room was very quiet. The lights, streaming from hidden sources, did not offend the eye and the pastel walls, tinted green soothed rather than intruded with their concept of limitations. Fendor, lying on the couch, breathed deeply and harshly through his mouth. Gregson, haggard, worn, stooped over him, his fingers gentle as he lifted an eyelid. Connault, hunched in his chair, wheeled it closer to the other man.

"How is he?"

"Recovered, I hope." Gregson slumped in a chair. "God, what a nightmare!"

"It was bad?" Connault looked at the other man. It was bad," he whispered. "It could have been nothing else." Irritably he pounded his fist on the arm of his chair. "I should have been with you. I should have helped."

"You did what you could." Gregson summoned enough strength to sit upright. Beyond the window dawn cast its first pale light across the sky. Connault stared at it with thoughtful eyes.

"I wonder," he mused, "what Fendor would have made of that?"

"Need you ask?" Gregson took a deep breath. "It would have been just a little more proof, if proof were needed." He rubbed his eyes, feeling fatigue roll over him in great, destroying waves. Never could he remember such fatigue but, he thought wryly, there was a reason. It was tiring work arguing with God. And, for all that, what had they proved?

"X113 is not what we hoped," said Connault. "Tomorrow we commence work on X114."

"And if that proves to be another failure?"

"More combinations, more trial and error, more work."

"And more like Fendor?" Connault shook his head.

"No. Fendor was so certain he was right, so insistent that he test the formulae on himself. Even so he was unwise. Such a mammoth dosage—"

"—and memory went like the flame of a candle in a high wind." Gregson slumped back in his chair, his eyes staring at the dawn. "Memory," he said. "We know so little. We say a word and think we know what we mean. We search for a drug which will cure psychopathic disorders, a selective tool with which to eliminate hurtful memories, erase them so that they can no longer work their psychosomatic mischief. One of us takes a mammoth dosage to test a private theory—and we manufacture a God!"

"We were lucky." Connault was sober with the thought of what might have been. "Another man would have shattered completely beneath the strain."

"No. Once I thought so too but I know better. Remember the effect of the drug. It not only destroyed memory but destroyed the capability of remembering. Imagine, if you can, what that means.

"There would be no continuity. Each thing seen would be seen for the first time. There would be nothing but a momentary image, ever changing, but you would not know that. Words would be mere sounds, each individual letter heard and forgotten before the next. No orientation, no communication, not even an awareness of self. Try to imagine it if you can."

Connault frowned, trying to do the impossible. His thick, square hands clenched on the arms of his wheeled chair.

"The motor responses would remain untouched," he said. "That was obvious when Fendor suddenly ran out of here. Perhaps there was a brief period before the drug reached major destruction. Then, of course, the lesions would begin to heal."

"The images would last longer," said Gregson. "They would remain a little more static. Then would come the realisation of disorientation and the fear that would bring. But memory would still be lacking. Only things at which you looked would be real. There would be nothing to tie them into a universal whole." He leaned forward. "Remember, it isn't enough just to remember, that memory has to be retained. If not then everything you see is as if for the first time."

"Chaos," said Connault.

"And from chaos, perhaps creation." Gregson turned and glanced at the man on the couch. His breathing was easier now, his facial muscles relaxed. He looked supremely peaceful as he lay there. A man who had known what it was to be master of his own world.

The sun had climbed higher in the sky and Gregson's throat was sore from talking, not just to Connault alone but from what had gone before. Leaning back he closed his burning eyes, reliving, in memory, a nightmare in which he walked and talked and commanded, sick now as he had been then with the need for constant repetition.

The necessity to be always in Fendor's universe. The need to hammer at him until his beautiful framework of logic had cracked. To destroy and to have no satisfaction in his destruction. Only the knowledge that he was trying to do his best for a man who was his friend. A man who had thought him nothing but a mounting irritation.

"It was inevitable," he said. "Given any kind of reasoning intelligence and there was only one conclusion Fendor could draw. He saw things, always fresh, remember, always different. His world was what he could,

personally, see. When he looked away he destroyed. When he looked he created. And he still had some memories deep in his subconscious. What else could he believe than that he was God?"

"And you?"

"I was his devil, I tormented him, always there, always questioning, always a nuisance. When he began to try and convince me then I knew that I had won. But, Connault, it wasn't easy!"

Gregson thought of the long hours with Fendor, the things they had done, the things he had said. He had fought against it but empathy had taken its toll. He had been close to Fendor, too close, and somehow, he had been affected by the other's state of mind so that he too had begun to doubt the weight of his memories.

How did he know that the world continued to exist when he closed his eyes?

How could he be certain that his memories were truly a result of things as they were?

And, worst of all, how could he be certain that they were his memories at all?

Behind him, on the couch, Fendor stirred, his eyes opening, his face resolving itself into lines and planes as muscles bunched and his supreme relaxation dissolved with waking. He turned his head, looked at the two men and, for a moment, doubt dulled their senses.

"Gregson." Fendor sat upright on the couch. "Connault." He looked at the window, now bright with day, then at the men in the room. "So it failed," he said.

"You feel nothing?" Gregson silenced Connault with a gesture.

"Nothing. I remember the needle—after that not a thing. It knocked me out, I suppose. Well?"

"It knocked you out." Curiosity nagged at Gregson's mind. "Nothing else?"

"Nothing to speak of. Just a weird kind of jumbled dream, you know the kind of thing, the paranoid sort in which you are supremely powerful and..." His voice faded as if with regret. "Just a dream."

"Yes," said Gregson handing Fendor his notes. "It was just a dream."

NO SHORT-CUTS

THERE CAN BE no question now that J. G. Ballard has emerged as the greatest imaginative writer of his day. This latest collection of stories is profoundly stimulating and emotionally exciting. It shows us a writer whose intellectual control of his subject-matter is only matched by the literary giants of the past, and it shows us a writer who is developing so rapidly that almost every story he writes is better than his last. He is the first really important literary talent to come from the field of modern SF and it is to his credit that he is as popular with his magazine audience as he ever was. He has shown that SF need make no concessions to the commercial publisher's idea of what the public wants.

The Terminal Beach (Gollancz, 18s) is a varied collection in many ways. It is varied in its subject matter and in its treatments which range from deep melancholy to light irony; methods of narration also vary. In *A Question of Re-entry* Ballard uses a formal narrative to great effect, telling the story of a man who hunts for a missing astronaut in the Amazon jungle and discovers instead an Indian Cargo Cult dominated by an enigmatic white man who rules them as their God. In *The Terminal Beach*, however, Ballard dispenses with formality and uses an impressionistic technique which is absolutely effective in its description of a wartime American bomber pilot who returns to Eniwetok obsessed with the idea of finding 'a key to the present.'

'Here, the key to the present lay in the future. This island was a fossil of time future, its bunkers and blockhouses illustrated the principle that the fossil record of life was one of armour and the exoskeleton.'

Perhaps this title story is his best yet. As far as Ballard is concerned, there is no 'mystery' to Time. Every human being carries its secret within him if he cares to search

for it in the deep layers of mind and spine. Ballard has complete confidence in the validity of his own obsessions and this confidence gives his work an intellectual clarity lacking in any of his rivals within the field and lacking in most of those outside it. Often described as 'poetic' writing and compared with Bradbury, Ballard's work contains very little 'fine writing' of the Bradbury type. Rather, the poetry is implicit in his choice of images and his writing is entirely explicit in style and content. As with William Burroughs, his only real literary rival, there is nothing obscure in Ballard's work. Obscurity, if it exists, is in the mind of the reader unable to shed his mind of preconceptions of what a story should be about and how it should be treated. Ballard not only knows what he is writing about, he has the technical and artistic mastery required to tell the reader, also. As for sense of wonder, his is very different from the kind which relies primarily on verbal keys to strike responses in the reader whether, like Bradbury, by use of emotion-laden words primarily associated with child-hood, or the more grandiose writers who rely in a similar fashion on high-flown prose of the 'Tanagorm, Master of the Palace of Time, voiced his golden laughter'-school. Ballard uses no such short-cuts and for this reason, as well as others, his work is sure to endure.

It would have been pointless to give little synopses of the stories here (the jacket is covered with them and they are as inadequate as they are dull). You can be certain that whatever Ballard writes about, it is good. Some of the stories have not been published previously anywhere, which is something of a bonus. Buy this one—as an investment if nothing else, for there will come a time when a Ballard first edition will be valuable.

Michael Moorcock

GOOD START

JOHN CARNELL'S CONTRIBUTION to British SF is never likely to be matched. For nearly twenty years he has been intimately connected with the field and he thoroughly deserves his present reputation as a man of sound judge-

ment and taste. The anthologies he has edited in the past have all been excellent, solidly balanced collections which bear many re-readings.

The same can be said for his latest anthology which is to be the first of a series. *New Writings In SF* (Dobson, 15s) is a collection of all-new material from new writers and established ones. It consists of a long Heck Belov novelette by Edward Mackin, a story about a survey team—man and woman—who are stranded on an unpleasant planet, by John Rankine, a very good story by Brian Aldiss, an intriguing long story by Joseph Green and James Webbert, and an excellent novelette by Australian Damient Broderick. None of the stories are world-shakers, but they are well-written, highly readable and—save perhaps for the Rankine—will be worth returning to. I enjoyed the Belov best and found it one of Mackin's funniest, but then I'm a sucker for Belov, that pompous, self-taught, intuitive genius of a cybernetician. This time Belov's involved with the usual pack of capitalist crooks, naïve young inventor and a machine which, thanks to his efforts, does something very odd in the fifth or sixth dimension. Aldiss is on top form style-wise with a sensitive portrayal of an unusual sort of superman. Green and Webbert come up with some good twists in their story of a mining world on which only honeymoon couples can survive, and Broderick's story is packed with lots of the old sense of wonder. It deals with a man striving for Galactic Union and has plenty of surprises.

This is the second anthology John Carnell has edited this year. An earlier one was published by Berkley in America and consists of seven of the most popular stories from NEW WORLDS between 1961-1963. Again it is a thoroughly solid collection of varied stories. It takes its title from the first story *Lamda One* by Colin Kapp which readers will probably remember was the lead-up to his recent serial *The Dark Mind*. The Aldiss story, *Basis for Negotiation* is extremely readable, though it is a little too reminiscent of *The Old Men At The Zoo* for my taste. Lee Harding's *Quest* is one of his best. *All Laced Up* by George Whitley is a light, yet memorable, story of a curvaceous time-trader from the future,

perhaps the best story is Philip High's *Routine Exercise*, about a submarine that is mysteriously transported into the prehistoric past. *Flux*, by Michael Moorcock, is one of his few stories that can be strictly called science fiction and has plenty of interesting ideas in it though I felt they could have been better developed. John Rackham's *The Last Salamander* is also one of his best. The book costs 50c (3/6).

The first *New Writings* is a good start to a series which promises to be one of the most popular and influential ever to be published in this country.

James Colvin

Short Reviews

Revolt in 2100, R. A. Heinlein (Gollancz, 16s). They're scraping the bottom of the barrel here. 3 stories on over-worked themes by SF's shadow-Hemingway.

The New Wilderness, Willard E. Wilks (Times Press, 21s). An excellent book discussing basic fundamentals of space travel—out of the run of ordinary books of this type.

The Night Spiders, John Lymington (Corgi 2/6). Though these stories are in the Corgi SF series, virtually none are SF—they're ghost stories and very, very bad ones.

Swords and Sorcery, ed. L. Sprague de Camp (Pyramid, 50c/3/6, Dist. Thorpe & Porter). Good introduction to a fantasy sub-genre—stories by Kuttner, Howard, Anderson, Lovecraft, C. L. Moore, Leiber and others, some of which were hard to find until now. Illustrated by Virgil Finlay.

3 in 1, ed. Leo Margulies (Pyramid, as above). 3 readable novelettes by Sturgeon, Simak, Leinster. Not their best, but worth a try.

Man of Two Worlds, Raymond F. Jones (Pyramid, as above, 2/6). Originally published as *Renaissance* and serialised in *ASTOUNDING*, 1944, this must have been fairly original when it first appeared, but there've been a lot like it since, some better. Good value, though, in spite of slightly dated style. The plot moves along well.

J C

LETTERS TO THE EDITOR



Two suggestions

Dear Sir,

It was pleasant to find that No. 142, interesting as it was, was excelled by No. 143. This indicates that there is a good supply of material. Ballard's serial needs no comment: it was up to the best he has written, but Hilary Bailey must be congratulated on her skilful treatment of an old theme. James Colvin's book reviews seemed well-formulated and intelligent. Format is original and attractive. Overall, the picture is extremely promising. I would, however like to make two suggestions.

1. Although the two best SF writers in the world are British, and several other British writers are among the top ranks, Britain has no strength *in depth*. The Nova magazines published some stories that were unsurpassed by American writers, but the average stories which make up the bulk of most magazines were particularly weary and unoriginal in NEW WORLDS and even SCIENCE FANTASY. Why not, therefore, try for some American writers. I can only deduce by the prolific amount that they write, that Laumer, Damon Knight, Dickson etc. are professionals. Surely they would welcome a new market? The only obstacle (a big one, admittedly) would be less financial gain. Which is connected with circulation. Which leads up to my second point.

2. Is NEW WORLDS being promoted sufficiently in America? I know nothing about import/export restrictions, but what I do know is that one can't walk into a small newsagent's in an isolated village without being hit in the face by a copy of ANALOG! Could the same be done or is it being done by you in America?

Finally the fact that NEW WORLDS and SCIENCE FANTASY have different editors will afford a welcome change of viewpoint and the friendly competition which is a requisite for the survival of SF in this form.

P. Johnson, 159 Kingsway, Petts Wood, Orpington, Kent

We agree there has been a dearth of good minor writers in the past, but we feel the situation is beginning to change. Indeed, a glance at the American magazines shows a similar dearth there, now. Plans for American promotion are being discussed currently and the next year could show us just what form that promotion will take.

Common Understanding

Dear Sir,

I question whether Burroughs, Anthony Burgess, or any other writer should move so far out of the realm of common understanding that the essential message of the book is lost to a majority of readers. I do believe in originality of expression—my own stories *The Engineer* (NW 115) and *Single Combat* (NW 142) are efforts in this direction—but I deplore writers who write for themselves, or the very small audience who can perhaps understand them. I think *Finnegans Wake* and *Ulysses* are eminent examples. Any person of normal intelligence can enjoy the latter, while *Wake* is customarily issued over here with an explanatory book which attempts to help you understand it! Both are highly original works. *Ulysses* is a classic. *Wake* was a dud.

Joseph Green, 511 N 67th St., Seattle,
Washington, U.S.A.

Everyone's capable of training themselves to get the most pleasure out of a good book. Surely the writer would be much more arrogant if he were to underestimate the reader's capabilities? And if the Key to the Wake succeeds in opening it up, if it's a necessary guide, then should we deplore either? Perhaps we should simply regard them as one book?

Dear Sir,

What disturbs me about editor Moorcock's recent essays *Aspects of Fantasy*, and J. G. Ballard's guest editorial in NEW WORLDS, and especially Mr. Ballard's new study of William Burroughs is that both Mr. Ballard and Mr. Moorcock are not detailed enough in their arguments, or rather, they seem to exclude many important authors; hence I am not very sure that I understand completely what is being said; hence I am disturbed. And doubly so since I admire Mr. Moorcock as an author, and think that Ballard is a very important talent.

When Mr. Ballard denounces authenticity of background in SF writing as a poor excuse for lack of creativity, I agree. However, which authors is Mr. Ballard referring to. Can he be attacking the brilliant realism of Arthur C. Clarke or Robert A. Heinlein?

Mr. Ballard says that SF which 'gets off the ground' and tries to be naturalistic lacks the moral conviction of a literature won from experience. Generally I agree, but does this invalidate Heinlein's history of the next century in space, or Clarke's portrait of the moon, as writing? We have yet to see just how authentic Clarke's conviction as a writer is, and I have a feeling that men who come back from the moon will have no trouble reading Clarke or Heinlein.

Mr. Ballard speaks of H. G. Wells as the greatest master of SF, and the setter of its conventions. But what about W. Olaf Stapledon, S. Fowler Wright, and William Hope Hodgson, especially the last author's *The Night Land*.

Imaginative writing (SF or Fantasy, I don't care what it is called) is not any *one* type of story. There is a great diversity in SF (I am not speaking of the great mass of rubbish), and despite the fact that I admire Mr. Ballard's writing, and that of Mr. Burroughs, I cannot envisage SF being dominated by any one kind of story. Here I agree with Mr. Ballard about the domination of the space story. But again this does not mean that good space space stories cannot be written. The handling must change, that's all.

Perhaps it would be useful if both Mr. Moorcock and Mr. Ballard would publish a list of their favourite SF of the past half century. This would give me and many readers a more balanced idea of Mr. Ballard's and Mr. Moorcock's ideas. At present they both seem to exclude some pretty good writers. It is their privilege, but at least an explanation, gentlemen?

I am all for experimentation, and can tolerate all writers; there is enough room for all types, and I suppose it takes all kinds. Mr. Ballard: What about Kurt Vonnegut, or Bester, or Blish, or any of the people I have mentioned?

I like Fantasy; I also like logical SF based on today's knowledge. I do not see any use in defining SF or distinguishing it from Fantasy, since they both can do the same things; but one dates. I like Joyce and Burroughs. I like diversity of authors. I like the cyclical novel but not as a steady diet. There's room for everybody?

Eric L. Vorbez, New York, U.S.A.

We think perhaps Mr. Ballard may have been attacking the brilliant realism of Mr. Clarke or Mr. Heinlein, but we agree with Mr. Vorbez—there's room for everybody. If he would like to send us his address, we should be pleased to forward him a copy of Mr. Heinlein's REVOLT IN 2100 as his prize for the best letter in this issue.

Christopher Priest of Brentwood, Essex, has sent in a letter in which he lists the classifications he thinks apply to types of SF story. It's interesting, and we'll probably publish it next issue. Meanwhile, have any other readers got ideas about the categories into which most SF stories fall?

A prize of a new hardcover SF title goes to the best letter in the issue, and letters should be sent to The Editor, NEW WORLDS SF, 17, Lake House, Scovell Road, London, S.E.1.

STORY RATINGS Nos. 140-141-142-143

140

1	The Terminal Beach	.....	J. G. Ballard
2	Open Prison (2)	.....	James White
3	Jetway 75	.....	William Spencer
4	The Unremembered	.....	E. Mackin
5	The Traps of Time	.....	John Baxter
6	Unfinished Business	.....	C. C. Reed

141

1	Open Prison (3)	.....	James White
2	Farewell, Dear Brother	.....	P. F. Woods
3	Megapolitan Underground	.....	William Spencer
4	Beyond the Reach of Storms	.....	Donald Malcolm
5	Now is the Time	.....	Steve Hall

142

1	Equinox (1)	.....	J. G. Ballard
2	The Last Lonely Man	.....	John Brunner
3	The Star Virus	.....	B. J. Bayley
4	Never Let Go of My Hand	.....	Brian Aldiss

143

1	Equinox (2)	.....	J. G. Ballard
2	The Fall of Frenchy Steiner	.....	Hilary Bailey
3	Single Combat	.....	Joseph Green
4	Goodbye Miranda	Michael Moorcock
5	Stormwater Tunnel	Langdon Jones
6	The Evidence	Lee Harding

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